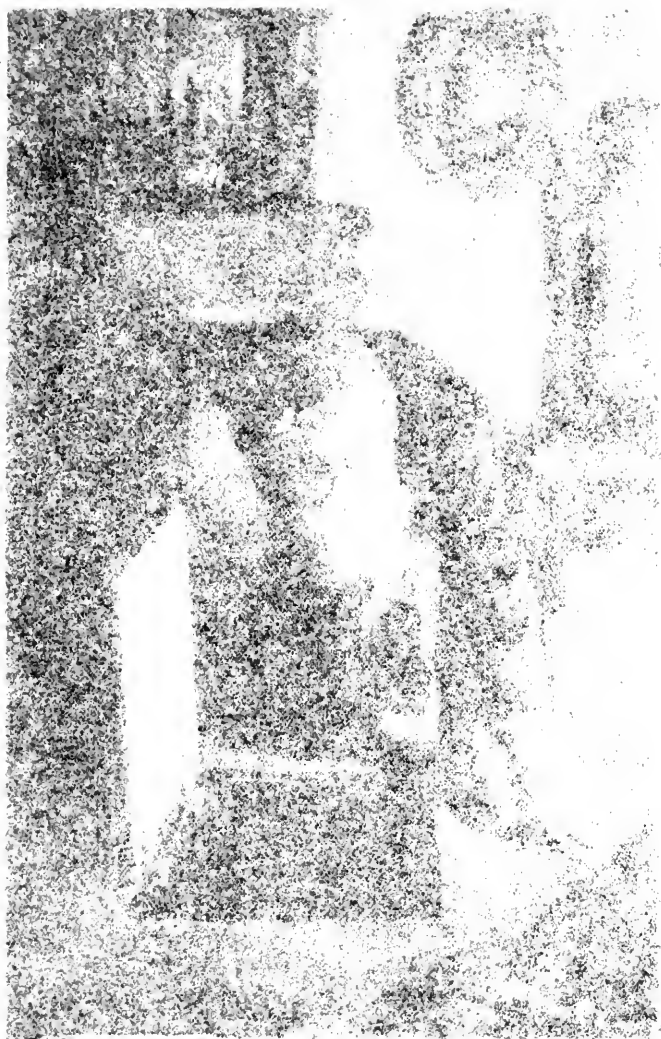


THE HOUSE
ON 
THE MALL

EDGAR JEPSON

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TY OF
CORNIA
DIEGO



THE HOUSE ON THE MALL

BY

EDGAR JEPSON

Author of "The Admirable Tinker," "Lady Noggs, Princess,"
"Arsene Lupin," etc.



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The House on the Mall

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THE HOUSE ON THE MALL

CHAPTER I

THE MARQUESS OF DRYSDALE MAKES A DISCOVERY

THE young man with the exceeding solemn face who stood on the steps of the house on the Mall was Francis Hugh Wentworth Penderel, Seventh Marquess of Drysdale. He paused to gaze up and down the river, beautiful and inviting in the sunlight, and congratulated himself on his foresight in having come out without an overcoat on the twentieth of April. Indeed after six hours bright sunshine the spring afternoon was almost hot.

He stood for perhaps two minutes admiring the sun on the river and the faint shade of the green of spring on the meadows on the further bank, with a softness and wistfulness in his fine brown eyes, somewhat out of keeping with his exceeding solemn face. Then he pressed the bell and knocked.

The door was opened by a pretty parlor-maid.

She smiled at the sight of him and said, "Mr. Rawnsley's out, my lord, and so is Mr. Mauleverer."

"I'll come in and wait till one of them comes home, Annie," said the Marquess, entering the hall; and with a sudden expression of extraordinary gloom he chucked her under the chin.

Annie giggled and withdrew swiftly from the young nobleman's reach.

The hall was lofty but not large; indeed it was not large enough to give full value to the fine Italian staircase imported from some palace by an eighteenth-century owner of the house. At the top of the first flight of stairs was a niche in the wall; and from the bottom of the niche rose a broad pedestal some six inches high on which a statue should have stood. But no statue stood on it; and there was a curious insistence about that empty niche; it seemed so to demand to be filled that its emptiness made not only the staircase but the whole hall look incomplete.

The Marquess gave Annie his hat and cane, and said, "I think I'll wait in the library."

He walked across the hall, along the corridor at the back of it, and into a room on the left-hand side at the end of the corridor. It was a lofty room lined with bookshelves on all its sides to a height of four feet from the ground. On the top of the bookshelves stood some fine bronzes and pieces of porcelain, European and Oriental, between pictures.

The Marquess gazed round the beautiful room with the carelessness of familiarity; then a new picture on the wall caught his eye; and he crossed the room to it. As he looked at it his eyes opened wide and he whistled softly. Lately there had been paragraphs in the papers about the disappearance of the famous Botticelli from Galatina and the great annoyance of the Italian authorities that it should have been smuggled out of the country. The Marquess gazed, frowning but admiring, at the picture, and the longer he gazed the surer he grew that if it were not the Galatina Botticelli itself, it was that much less probable thing, an exceedingly fine contemporary copy of it. He gazed his fill and came to the window.

He looked down into the garden; and his eyes opened wide again; on the lawn, in the warm sun, sat a girl reading. The sunbeams playing in her soft brown hair filled it with gleams of gold. Her rounded cheeks were delightful with the hue of wild roses. Her nose was straight; and the Marquess could see plainly the delicate curve of the nostril. Her lips were sensitive, a little full, and curved in the fashion of Cupid's bow. The Marquess thought that he had never seen lips which so invited kisses. Her chin was betwixt round and square, with an enchanting dimple in it. Her forehead was broad, her brows level; but the Marquess could not see the eyes under them. They never

stirred from the book; and her lips were a little parted as if she found it thrilling.

The Marquess was not unduly sensible to the charms of women. But this was the face of a dream; and he stood gazing at it with a warm admiration. Then he began to desire to see what color were her eyes. He was about to make a noise to make her look up, when the empty garden chair beside her suggested to him that he would see those eyes much better were he nearer to them. He drew quietly back from the window, came quietly out of the room, and even more quietly through the glass door, down the moss-grown steps, and on to the lawn ten feet away from her. Then she started, raised her head, and gazed at him with the most glorious dark-blue eyes he had ever seen.

The heart of the Marquess leapt in his bosom; but he gazed at her with an ineffable solemnity, bowed, and said, "Please don't let me disturb you; but I'm waiting for Mr. Rawnsley; and the garden seemed the proper place to wait in on a glorious afternoon like this." And he smiled at her.

The Marquess did not often smile, but when he did his smile was uncommonly winning. It illumined his solemn, stern face in a fashion which many women found fascinating. Some of them had made no secret to him of its fascination.

The girl hesitated; and the hue of wild roses deepened in her cheeks. His smile and the solemn-

nity into which it faded seemed to reassure her; and in a low, well-modulated, delightful voice she said, "Yes, it is an afternoon for out-of-doors."

The Marquess looked at her with solemn eyes; and her eyes fell before them. She found them masterful. Then he said: "Well, as there's no one to introduce us, I had better introduce myself. I am the Marquess of Drysdale."

The girl hesitated. The solemn eyes of the Marquess rested on her face, grave and inquiring. She found a compulsion in them; and she said in reluctant obedience to it, "I am Nancy Weston, Mr. Rawnsley's secretary."

"Ah," said the Marquess, sitting down in the empty chair with a faint sight of relief, "I was hoping you had a name like that."

He crossed his legs and gazed solemnly round the garden. She was a little taken aback; but his solemnity was disarming. With a quick glance she took in his profile, the rather high forehead, the strong, arched nose, the firm, full lips, and the strong, square chin. His skin was rather pale but clear; and there was a ripple in his dark-brown, almost black, hair.

"I think that this is one of the oddest gardens in London," he said. "This turf must be at least three hundred years old; and these cedars of Lebanon are not much younger than the Crusades; and

then you have that abominable modern building towering above it all."

He nodded towards the bottom of the garden, where, above the row of tall, dense sycamores, rose for thirty feet the top of the wall of Rawnsley's Emporium.

"It's a blessing that there are no windows in it. Mr. Rawnsley had the sense not to let anyone overlook his garden," he said.

"Yes, that would have been a pity," said Nancy.

This impersonal talk about the garden was setting her at her ease. Besides, she did not know the proper method of dealing with marquesses who coolly introduced themselves to you, especially when they were so very solemn. Marquesses are not as other men.

They both looked round the garden, appraising it. On their right was a thirty-foot, ivy-covered wall. It shut out the houses of the Malkin Lane, which runs along the side of the garden from the Mall to the High Road. On their left a thick shrubbery of tall Wellingtonias and deodoras shut them in with a wall of a richer green.

"When it's peaceful like this one might be thirty miles out of London," said the Marquess. "But often the hum from the power-house behind those Wellingtonias spoils it."

"It's very curious but I never hear the hum now," said Nancy. "You see I live in the power-house."

"You live in the power-house?" said the Marquess.

"Yes, my uncle is the engineer of it," said Nancy.

"Why the vibration must make it like living on a steamer. But perhaps you're a good sailor," said the Marquess.

"I'm quite used to it now. I don't notice it. But when I first came from the country it *was* like living on a steamer."

"Ah, you came from the country—proper place for you," said the Marquess; and his eyes rested, quiet and admiring, on her beautiful face.

"Yes, I lived all my life at Alington, till six months ago," said Nancy; and she sighed.

"And now you live in a power-house and act as Mr. Rawnsley's secretary. Don't you hate it?"

"No, I don't hate it exactly; but I like the country better," said Nancy thoughtfully. "But then my aunt died; and I came to live with my uncle. I don't like work much; but then I have to work."

"You shouldn't like it at all," said the Marquess firmly. "It's so unintelligent to like work—unless it's work you want to do; and then of course it's a game."

"Yes, if it had been gardening it would have been quite another thing," said Nancy quickly.

"But there are things in London which make up for not being in the country—friends, theatres, pic-

ture galleries," said the Marquess; and his eyes grew keen and questioning.

Nancy shook her head: "I haven't any friends yet—not real friends; and I don't often go to the theatre. My uncle doesn't care for things like that. You see he's an inventor as well as an engineer; and he's always working."

The Marquess looked faintly relieved; and his eyes grew careless again: "It must be very dull for you," he said.

"Oh, no; I have lots of books to read. My uncle subscribes to Boots' Library for me."

"They're not like life," said the Marquess.

"They're all I've got," said Nancy.

He talked to her about books she had read and books she liked, and told her of other books she would like. He learned from her the hours she worked, the hours at which she went to the Emporium and came away from it, slipping in his questions with careless deftness in the middle of their talk about books. All the while he watched her face changing from beauty to beauty as it changed from expression to expression. Her simplicity charmed him; it even touched him a little. He could not understand how such a beautiful creature had contrived to remain so simple. This was indeed a flower to find in this Old World garden; he was interested, a little excited.

They had grown almost intimate when a voice above them said, "How are you, Drysdale?"

They looked up startled; and framed in the window of the library they saw the leonine, benevolent head of Mr. Rawnsley.

The Marquess rose reluctantly, bent down, shook hands with Nancy, and said, "It was awfully good of you to let me inflict myself on you like this. We shall meet again soon. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Nancy, flushing in a sudden shyness as she realized how intimate she had grown with an utter stranger.

The Marquess walked up into the library; and Mr. Rawnsley greeted him with a somewhat mocking smile.

"I see that it's you who have collared the Galatina Botticelli," said the Marquess, promptly taking the offensive.

"Yes: things do come my way," said Mr. Rawnsley, carelessly. "You seemed to be getting on very well with Miss Weston."

"Yes. Who is Miss Weston?" said the Marquess.

"I think you had better let her alone," said Mr. Rawnsley.

"I always let them alone," said the Marquess very solemnly.

CHAPTER II

THE THREE DRUNKEN MEN AND THE THREE GREY-BEARDS

THE clocks of Knightsbridge had just struck one of the morning of the 21st of April when Mr. Ramsay, a Londoner of the shabbiest and most uncleanly appearance, shambled across the road from the pavement which runs under the wall of the Knightsbridge Barracks and took his way into Rutland Gate. He had been shivering peacefully, for his coat and trousers were thin and ventilated by openings in unusual places, in the shelter of the wall of the barracks for half an hour, ever since the closing of the bars, in fact; but a few yards down Rutland Gate he began to behave in a far from peaceful way. He shouted and yelled and roared and screamed in a manner which might have excited but little notice in the Commercial Road, Whitechapel, but which was highly improper in the select and expensive quarter which now echoed and re-echoed to his voice. At the same moment Mr. Robert Turner came from Ennismore Gardens into the bottom of Rutland Gate and was even

more loudly guilty of the same improper behavior. A minute later Mr. William Preece came into Rutland Gate from Montpelier Square and at once grew vocal with the same vehemence. From their appearance and dress Mr. Robert Turner and Mr. William Preece might have been brothers of Mr. Hector Ramsay and of one another. As a matter of fact, there was no tie of blood between any of these three; the likeness between them probably arose from the fact that they all followed the same occupation, that of propping up the walls of saloons in the intervals of acting as cab-touts.

Police constable 191 was hurrying up Rutland Gate towards Mr. Hector Ramsay, with the intention of ridding a quiet neighborhood of a vociferous intruder with the least possible delay, when he heard Mr. Robert Turner raise his untuneful roar at the bottom. He did not stay his steps, however; he seized Mr. Hector Ramsay and hurried him up into the Knightsbridge road. As they reached it, Mr. Hector Ramsay put his foot in front of police constable 191 and they came to the ground together. Police constable 191 rose and hesitated; then his ears assured him that Rutland Gate was silent, and he resolved to take Mr. Hector Ramsay to the police station.

Silence reigned in Rutland Gate because, after one loud burst of yelling, Mr. Robert Turner had turned on his heel and gone back into Ennismore

Gardens where he yelled on; and at the same time Mr. William Preece also had turned and was now roaring in Montpelier Square. In three minutes Mr. Robert Turner had fallen into the strong hands of police constable 327, who hustled him down into the Brompton Road. At about the same moment Mr. William Preece was culled in Montpelier Square by police constable 498 and also hurried down into the Brompton Road.

It was in the main thoroughfares that the captives became restive. Mr. Hector Ramsay every twenty yards flung himself down on the ground weeping, so that police constable 191 had to enlist the services of the policeman on duty at the corner of the Knightsbridge and Brompton Roads to help get him to the police station. Mr. Robert Turner went like a silent lamb as far as the Brompton Road; then by a sudden jerk he broke away from his captor and raced him to the Oratory. There he was recaptured. Mr. William Preece, who prided himself on being a fighting Imperialist, was in the end frogmarched to the police station by four policemen, two of them black-eyed.

By the time the charges had been taken and the three prisoners safely deposited in their cells, it was a quarter to two. From five minutes past one till a quarter to two therefore Rutland Gate was uncommonly bare of policemen.

Those of the dwellers in it who had retired to

bed at a reasonable hour had no occasion to observe this fact; Lady Aldington had. She had been supping after some auction bridge at the house of Lord Trouton in Park Lane. When she got into her motor brougham she was annoyed to perceive that Henry Timbs, the footman who was wont to sit beside her chauffeur, was not in his place. Near the Albert Gate she stopped the brougham to learn the reason of his absence. The chauffeur told her that on his return from taking her to Lord Trouton's Henry Timbs had gone out, just for an hour or two, but had not returned by the time the brougham must start to bring her home. Lady Aldington was so absorbed in the consideration whether to discharge Henry Timbs for his unpunctuality, or merely reprimand him severely, that she failed to notice Mr. Hector Ramsay lying in tears on the pavement in the middle of a group composed of one aggravated policeman and seven sympathetic spectators who were adjuring the aggravated policeman not to be brutal with the poor man. The chauffeur passed the group with a cynical smile; he was a man of the world. Lady Aldington had decided to discharge Henry Timbs when the brougham stopped at Lord Aldington's house in Rutland Gate.

She was about to open the door of the brougham and let herself into the house; for, of course, it was not the work of the chauffeur to ring the bell for her, and he was sitting still in his seat, when a

grey-bearded cab-tout opened the door for her. She stepped out of it; and on the instant the tout threw his right arm round her arms and body, gripped her throat with his left, and half dragging, half carrying her, stepped into the brougham with her. She could neither resist nor scream. At the same moment a much bigger man, of the same tout-like appearance and also grey-bearded, who had stolen up on the other side of the brougham, seized the chauffeur by the throat, with both hands, from behind, lugged him from his seat, and dragged him into the brougham by the other door. As the chauffeur was dragged from his seat, a grey-bearded man in the dress of a coachman stepped into it from the pavement, and at a cry of "Right!" from one of the new occupants of the brougham, started it up Rutland Gate.

As the brougham started, her captor, still keeping his left hand on Lady Aldington's throat, thrust a gag into her mouth, bound her hands and feet with pieces of rope of a convenient size which he took from the pocket of his jacket, and then blindfolded her. He bound her hands and feet tightly, letting no sentimental considerations of her sex or her comfort interfere with her security. Then he dropped her back, as helpless as a trussed fowl, in her seat, and turned his attention to the chauffeur, who was rather more than half throttled by the grip of his big companion. He gagged, bound and blind-

folded him with a celerity which could only have come from considerable practice in the art of trussing up his fellow creatures. Then he lifted Lady Aldington on to the front seat beside the chauffeur; and his big companion moved over to his side. Finally he took a cigar-case from his pocket, offered a cigar to that big companion, lighted one himself; and the pair of them sat back, smoking comfortably. Not a word had been spoken. By that time the brougham was running into Kilburn.

They sat still in the same silence for nearly half an hour; and the brougham was in the open country beyond Harrow. Then the kidnapper took an electric lamp from his pocket, switched it on, and proceeded to strip off Lady Aldington's jewels, her necklace, tiara, and ear-rings in which were set the famous Aldington emeralds, her bracelets and her rings. In three minutes he had transferred thirty thousand pounds worth of jewels from her person to a wash-leather bag. He put it in his pocket, lighted another cigar, and leaned back in his seat with a faint sigh of satisfaction.

Five and thirty minutes later, though it seemed more like two hours to the terrified chauffeur and his mistress, the brougham turned off the road, ran along turf for perhaps a hundred yards, and stopped. The big kidnapper got out of it, the other lifted Lady Aldington and the chauffeur on to the back seat, covered them with a rug, and got out also.

The brougham was standing in a grove of pine trees; the grey-bearded man who had driven it had left his seat; and the three of them walked to the road. On the edge of it they waited behind a screen of furze bushes. They had not waited ten minutes before a large motor car, covered with a cape hood, came slowly and noiselessly down the road. They got into it; it turned and was presently going through the winding lanes as fast as was safe.

It came out on to the London road a mile above Watford on the King's Langley side. In very little more than half an hour it ran down the Edgware Road to the Marble Arch. There it turned up Bayswater and ran to Notting Hill. At the corner of Church Street a grey-bearded man of middle height, but of uncommon breadth, got out of it and walked briskly down the High Street towards Holland Park Avenue. As he opened the door of the car, with his back to his confederates, he stripped off his grey beard, and before his foot touched the pavement he was a mustachioed man. The car ran down Church Street into Kensington and from there to Piccadilly. At the corner of St. James's Street a grey-bearded man in a top hat and long black overcoat got out of it and went down St. James's Street. As he turned into King Street he stripped off his beard and became clean-shaven. The car ran down to Victoria. It stopped at the corner

of the Vauxhall Bridge Road; and there the big kidnapper got out of it and walked down towards Vauxhall. He was wearing now a short, pointed black beard, and loud checked suit. The car turned, came back down into Piccadilly, ran through Kensington and Hammersmith into the Chiswick High Road, and turned down Malkin Lane on to the Mall. It stopped before the wooden doors beside a big house on the Mall. The driver got down, opened them and then the doors of a motor garage, and ran the car into it. It was a very softly-moving car; and it is to be doubted that any of the dwellers in the Mall heard it return.

At five o'clock in the morning William Gosset, a farm laborer, crossing Chipperfield Common on his way to work, was greatly surprised to see a motor brougham standing among the pine trees a few yards from the path. He went to it, and was even more surprised to see that the two people, sitting so still on the back seat, were blindfolded. After a little hesitation, for quickness was not the prime quality of his wits, he rapped on the glass of the window. The further figure, a man, drew his hands from under the rug which covered the knees of the two figures, and held them out. William Gosset saw that they were bound together. He went round to the other door, opened it, got into the brougham, took the bandage off the man's eyes, and unbound his hands. The man took the gag

out of his mouth, and rubbing his stiff wrists with his stiff hands, bade William Gosset unbind his feet. As soon as they were unbound, he and William Gosset freed Lady Aldington from the bandage over her eyes, the gag, and her bonds. Her tongue was stiff, but she contrived to say a good deal, none of it greatly to the point. As he got his limbs limber, the chauffeur questioned William Gosset as to their whereabouts. Then, as soon as he got rid of some of his stiffness, he got out of the brougham and tested his engine. He found it in going order, and he found that there was enough petrol left in the tank to take them to London. He went back to the door of the brougham and suggested to Lady Aldington that the London police were best qualified to deal with the matter, and that the sooner it was in their hands the better. She agreed with him. He inquired of William Gosset the nearest way to the London Road, gave him five shillings, and started.

At ten minutes past six the brougham reached Lord Aldington's house in Rutland Gate. Lady Aldington found most of the servants awake and her husband in a state of the liveliest alarm. He had long ago roused Lord Trouton and learned that she had left Park Lane at about one o'clock. He had roused others of their friends in Mayfair and learned that she had not stopped at any of their houses on her way home. Then he had rung up Scotland Yard and informed the detectives on duty

of her disappearance. On hearing of her adventure, he at once rang them up again and informed them of the kidnapping and of the theft of the Aldington emeralds.

At ten minutes to seven Detective Inspector Giffen arrived at Rutland Gate and heard the story from the lips of Lady Aldington and the chauffeur. At first, with the catholicity of suspicion which marks the true detective, he was disposed to regard the affair as a put-up job between the lady and the chauffeur, since it was always probable that Lady Aldington, a leader of the polite world, might have got into trouble at bridge or racing and be sorely in need of money. But after he had questioned them separately, displaying far more gentleness in his interview with Lady Aldington than in his interview with the chauffeur, he came to the conclusion not only that it was not a put-up job between them, but that neither of them was in any way concerned in the theft save as a victim of the kidnappers. Then he perceived that he had to deal with one of the best-planned and most audacious robberies which had ever been brought to the notice of Scotland Yard. He was inclined to attribute it to American enterprise.

He lost no time. He went back to Scotland Yard, drew up a report of the circumstances of the robbery for the consideration of his superiors, when they should arrive at their offices, and soon after

half-past nine he was on Chipperfield Common, examining the ground before starting on his inquiries into the means by which the thieves had left the neighborhood.

Soon after ten that morning, Mr. Hector Ramsay and Mr. Robert Turner were fined five shillings, with an option of going to prison for seven days, for having been drunk and disorderly the night before. Mr. William Preece was fined twenty shillings, with the option of going to prison for a month, for having also resisted the police in the execution of their duty. In spite of the fact that their fines were paid, an event unique in the history of any of the three, the police failed to connect their obstreperous behavior with the loss of Lady Aldington's emeralds. Not one of the three connected himself with that loss. In the first place, they did not know that the emeralds had been stolen, since Inspector Giffen kept that knowledge from the papers for six days, and only suffered them to learn it then because he had not been able to find the smallest clue to the grey-bearded kidnappers, and hoped that publicity might bring him one. In the second place, had they known of the robbery, Mr. Hector Ramsay, Mr. Robert Turner and Mr. William Preece were given to drink, not thought. In the third place, after each of the three had received at a different public-house the three sovereigns from the young gentleman of a waggish air whose humorous

mind, so he told them, had conceived the agreeable, but practical, joke of rousing the inhabitants of Rutland Gate, Ennismore Gardens and Montpelier Square from their early morning slumbers, all three of them were in a state of intoxication, which prevented all thought for a week. At the end of that week all three of them were in gaol. When they came out the events of the preceding month were so hazy in their minds that it would probably have been impossible, even for the one person who had all the facts at his finger ends, to convince them that they had cleared Rutland Gate of police for the period during which their presence was unnecessary to the kidnappers.

CHAPTER III

THE AMBITIONS OF THE MARQUESS

THE Marquess of Drysdale had fallen into the life of Nancy Weston with a good deal of the effect of a stone falling into a quiet pond; he ruffled it. His face and his talk kept recurring to her mind. She wondered whether she ought not to have refused to let him make her acquaintance unIntroduced. Her aunt and her friends at Alington, Mrs. Piggott, the wife of the doctor, and Mrs. Mainwaring, the wife of the parson, her instructors in the social observances, had taught her to discourage with the utmost firmness the unIntroduced acquaintance. She did not know how far their instructions applied to marquesses; and nothing could have been more a matter of course than the way in which the Marquess had sat down and talked to her.

She wondered, too, what he had meant by saying that they would soon meet again. It seemed a most unlikely thing, though they might meet in the garden. That would be a mere chance, for what with her work and the weather she would not get

many opportunities of reading in the garden. If they did meet, she could not very well discourage him now after their acquaintance had actually begun. Indeed she did not know exactly how to set about discouraging him: she did not think that it would be at all easy. She wondered if it were his habit to become intimate, unIntroduced, with any girl he chanced to find in a garden. Perhaps more experienced girls knew the proper process of snubbing marquesses.

She wondered much at his solemnity, whether he were always as solemn. It seemed a remarkable quality in so young a man: he could not be more than twenty-seven or twenty-eight. She had a fancy that he was not always so solemn; certainly he was not solemn when he smiled; it was a delightful smile.

In the end she made up her mind that it was very unlikely that she would ever meet him again. She was wrong. Two afternoons later, on her way home from the Emporium, she did meet him half-way down Malkin Lane. He was coming up it at a brisk pace, as if he were hastening on the most pressing business in the world.

He seemed to be about to pass her without recognizing her, when he stopped short, his solemn face broke into its charming smile, and he held out his hand, saying: "How do you do, Miss Weston? It is a piece of luck chancing on you like this."

It might have been due to luck; it might also have been due to the fact that for the last half-hour the Marquess of Drysdale had been strolling up and down the bottom of Malkin Lane. Nancy, unused to the ways of London and of men, did not suspect this.

She shook hands with him, shyly; and he turned and walked down the lane with her.

"Has Mr. Rawnsley been working you very hard to-day?" he said.

"No, I've not had very much to do," said Nancy.

"Ah, I thought you were looking rather pale. It must be being shut up in an office," said the Marquess.

"I don't feel pale," said Nancy.

"Perhaps you will feel it presently," said the Marquess.

He congratulated her on the weather she kept in Chiswick, asked her whether she had finished her book and how she liked it; and they came round the corner and along the Mall to the big wooden doors which led to Mr. Rawnsley's garage. Nancy stopped and held out her hand.

The Marquess looked at it with evident interest, but he did not take it: "That paleness—don't you think a little walk—to the end of the Mall? Yes; I think a little walk to the end of the Mall."

Nancy stood still, hesitating.

"It would do me good, too," said the Marquess. "I've been working like a nigger all day."

"Well, just to the end of the Mall. I have to give my uncle his tea. He would forget all about it if I didn't; he is so absent-minded," said Nancy.

They walked on a few steps, and she said: "You say you've been working to-day. I thought you didn't like work."

"It wasn't really work; it was politics. They're my game, you know," said the Marquess.

"They must be very interesting," said Nancy, impressed.

"Yes, they're great fun—better than hunting. I'm going to be Prime Minister one of these days."

Nancy digested the information; then she said, "You look as though you were a very good politician."

The Marquess stopped short with a look of great dismay. "I hope not," said he quickly.

"Well, you look so very serious for your age," said Nancy.

"Oh, that," said the Marquess with an air of relief. "The newspapers expect a politician to look serious."

"I thought it couldn't be quite real—all of it," said Nancy.

"What?" said the Marquess.

"Your seriousness," said Nancy.

"Oh, but it is. I'm a very serious man indeed," protested the Marquess.

They walked on a few paces in silence, Nancy looking at the sunlit river, the Marquess looking down at Nancy's charming face.

Then she said, "It must be very difficult to get to be Prime Minister."

"Not at all," said the Marquess, airily. "There was once a young nobleman, a mere earl, by the way, who made up his mind to be Prime Minister and win the Derby—a simple taste, wasn't it?"

"Very," said Nancy.

"Now I'm going to be Prime Minister and marry the most beautiful woman in Europe," the Marquess went on; and his tone was almost sepulchral.

Nancy was aware of a sudden lack of interest in the ambitions of the Marquess, but she said politely, "That will be difficult too, won't it?"

"Oh, dear, no," said the Marquess. "You see it's like this: first there are the princes of royal blood; they have to marry princesses. That puts them out of my way. Then there are the dukes—we need only consider the English dukes—they are either married or else too stupid to want anything much out of the common. I know them all. That puts the dukes out of the way and leaves it open for marquesses. Now I am the senior unmarried marquess of England: that gives me first claim. So you see the most beautiful woman in Europe becomes mine."

He was looking down at Nancy, hard ; but Nancy was looking straight ahead of her with her brow knitted in a faint frown as she followed this intricate matter : "But won't you find it very difficult to find her?" she said.

"Of course I mean the most beautiful woman in Europe I can find," said the Marquess.

"I see," said Nancy; and a few steps further on she added: "It seems rather curious to marry a woman, just because she's beautiful."

"It's the custom of the English peerage," said the Marquess. "Consider the chorus girl."

"Of course there is that," said Nancy, thoughtfully; "but suppose when you did find her she wouldn't marry you?"

Nancy, looking straight in front of her, failed to observe that the eyes of the Marquess were dancing, and that faint smiles played about the corners of his mouth: "It is impossible to suppose that," he said. "In matters of the heart we must always bear in mind that the senior unmarried Marquess of England is the senior unmarried Marquess of England."

Nancy frowned more deeply as she pondered this state of affairs. Then she said, "But suppose she turned out to be a princess?"

"Now you're joking," said the Marquess; and he laughed heartily.

His laugh was loud but infectious; and Nancy

laughed too. Plainly the Marquess was not as solemn as he looked.

"And how are you going to find her?" she said.

The Marquess said that the discharge of his political duties had hitherto prevented him from beginning the search; and the discussion of different methods brought them back to the big wooden doors.

They stopped, and the Marquess looked at Nancy very solemnly and said: "I often think that tea is a delicious drink especially at this hour of the afternoon. Indeed, I usually have it at this hour. Has it ever occurred to you what a long way Chiswick is from tea?"

"There are teashops in the High Road," said Nancy.

"Would you condemn me to a teashop—in the High Road?" said the Marquess sadly.

"There's—there's Mr. Rawnsley," said Nancy.

"Go to tea with Mr. Rawnsley without an invitation?" said the Marquess in a tone of horror.

Nancy looked at him a little helplessly. She could not think of the process by which you checked a marquess who hinted with such vigor that he wished to come to tea with you. His usual solemnity had become a preternatural gloom.

"Will you come and have tea with us?" she said rather faintly. "Though I'm sure I don't know

what my uncle will be like. He may just have been inventing something."

"I shall be charmed. I like inventors," said the Marquess, opening the wooden door with alacrity.

CHAPTER IV

A DIVISION OF SPOILS

AT ten o'clock of the evening of the 21st of May, three men sat in the dining-room of 11 Malkin Lane. They had just come to the end of their dinner; and none of the three had yet flicked the first ash off his cigar. There was little in the appearance of the three to account for the atmosphere of the room; a sense of danger hung on it. Montague Burge, head of the jewelry department of Rawnsley's Emporium, a hard-eyed, hard-mouthed brute of forty, was merely the type of the successful slave-driver of the big, modern shop. The face of that well-known man about town, Mr. Herbert Shore-Wardell, with the little nose and little mouth in the middle of its round, florid expanse, was the face of a very large, but rose-pink, baby. Colonel Claude Webling, late of the Ottoman army, was indeed a man of a different stamp. With his lean, bony head, his big, hooked, predatory nose jutting out from his narrow, tanned face, he looked like a vulture. Yet his appearance alone was not enough to account for that atmosphere of danger; it was

diffused from the three of them. The room was sinister.

The empty magnums, two on the sideboard, one on the table, were evidence that they had dined wisely and too well. Yet Montague Burge showed no vinous mellowing (a magnum would only clear his hard head) and the eyes of Colonel Webling were keen and alert; he looked as sober as a fasting vulture. But the baby face of Mr. Herbert Shore-Waddell was richly crimson; his pale, blue eyes, always shallow, were curiously lack-lustre and empty; and his drooping cigar was but insecurely held between his lips. Possibly his habit of looking frequently on the whiskey when it was yellow, as he played bridge of an afternoon, had unfitted him for carrying his magnum with a gentlemanly ease.

There had been a silence for two or three minutes, one of the happy silences of wise men reflecting on good food. Montague Burge broke it; he said in a rough, unpleasant voice, which even an excellent dinner had not smoothed:

“And now for a little business, gentlemen.”

Colonel Webling turned his keen eyes on him; Mr. Shore-Wardell's lack-lustre eyes brightened with a faint flicker of intelligence.

“The object of the next operation, gentlemen, is a young American,” said Montague Burge. “His name is Rupert Christopher Drayton. He will arrive at the Savoy on the twenty-ninth of this month.

He could have brought the best of introductions from the States, but he is bringing none. He has one of these new-fangled bees in his bonnet, Social Reform or some such idiocy, and he is going to see England for himself on the quiet, instead of mixing in those er—er exalted circles his money entitles him to mix in.”

“Some kind of a damned radical, I suppose,” said Colonel Webling in a slow, deep, sonorous voice.

“That’s it, I expect,” said Montague Burge. “Well, the chief has other views for him, I take it, for he wishes Shore-Wardell——”

In a flash Mr. Shore-Wardell’s eyes were quite intelligent: “Will you be so good as to call me ‘*Mister* Shore-Wardell,’ Burge?” he snapped in a high-pitched, squeaky voice which sounded the squeakier for its contrast to the rich tones of Colonel Webling.

“Certainly—certainly, Mr. Shore-Wardell—no offence meant, and I hope none taken,” said Montague Burge hastily.

“Thatsh all right,” said Mr. Shore-Wardell; and in waving his hand in a dignified gesture, he lost his support, lurched forward and would have buried his nose in the dish of almonds and raisins before him, had not the right arm of Colonel Webling shot out and straightened him in his seat. With a grunt he dropped on to the support of his arms again, and de-

plored squeakily the slipperiness of the chair in which he was sitting.

Montague Burge had paused for the restoration of the *status quo ante* of Mr. Shore-Wardell, and when he was silent, he said :

"Well, the Chief wishes you two gentlemen to show this young chap England, whether he wants you to or not. You make his acquaintance at the Savoy." Here he drew a note-book from his pocket and consulted it. "The Chief suggests an opening to you. This young Drayton is connected with the Dorset Draytons—one of them emigrated to the States about a hundred and fifty years ago—and you might work that opening."

"The Chief does think of things," said Colonel Webling.

"What was the young fellow's fathersh name?" said Mr. Shore-Wardell. "If he wash a Dorset Drayton, it musht have been something Christopher—they're all shomething Christopher."

"I don't know: the Chief didn't tell me," said Montague Burge, again looking at his note-book. "Drayton's not at all cocky about his family, only interested in it."

"Impudent dog—good English blood like that and not cocky about it. The fellow's a snob," said Mr. Shore-Wardell indignantly.

"Those are all the Chief's instructions for the present. As soon as you have got friendly with

Drayton, the Chief will see the Colonel and tell him what he wants doing. In the meantime here's Drayton's photo," said Montague Burge.

He took a photograph from his pocket and handed it across the table to Colonel Webling. The Colonel looked at it carefully and saw the face of a young man of twenty-eight, a face of a type growing more and more common in the States every year, almost a Roman type, recalling to the mind the busts of the twelve Cæsars, no one of them indeed, rather a composite of half-a-dozen of them. The face was between square and round, the forehead broad, the brows level and a little projecting; the eyes were deep-set and large. They looked out of the portrait with a keen, frank gaze. The nose was clean-cut, straight, and a trifle thick; the lips were firm and rather thin, the chin square, the line of the jaw clean. It was the strong, self-reliant face of a man who trusts himself and can be trusted.

"He'll give plenty of trouble, if once he tumbles to our game," said Colonel Webling carelessly, putting the photograph into his pocket. "I'll take care of it and show it to Shore-Wardell to-morrow—no use now."

There was something un-English in his sonorous speech, not in the accent but in the manner of his speaking. The English words seemed to come stiffly off his tongue, as though it had grown used to another language and disused to them.

"Right. And now, gentlemen, I have a pleasanter piece of business still," said Montague Burge, suddenly washing his hands in the invisible soap and water of the shop-walker. "Lady Aldington's jewels have been sold; and I can now hand over to you your shares of the proceeds."

The intelligence, all the intelligence they ever showed, came back to the eyes of Mr. Shore-Wardell. Montague Burge went to a bureau, which stood against the end wall of the room, took from a drawer two bulky envelopes, came back to the table, and sat down again.

"I managed to sell the jewels better than I expected. Your share comes to fifteen hundred pounds, Colonel, and yours to a thousand, Mr. Shore-Wardell," he said. "It's all in fivers, tens and twenties."

He tossed one of the envelopes across the table to Colonel Webling, and the other to Mr. Shore-Wardell, with an air of splendid patronage. Neither of them missed that air; but neither of them paused to resent it. For two or three minutes there was no sound but the rustling of the banknotes they were counting. The baby face of Mr. Shore-Wardell was alive with an expression of extraordinary greed. Under the influence of that emotion his very muscles had tautened; he no longer needed the support of his arms; greed had sobered him.

He finished counting the notes, put them into his

pocket, then leaned, frowning, towards Montague Burge, and cried, or rather squeaked, in his querulous, high-pitched voice: "This won't do, Burge! This won't do! Those jewels are worth thirty thousand pounds—every penny of thirty thousand pounds. I must have more than a thousand for my share—a good deal more than a thousand."

Colonel Webling bent forward and took another cigar from the box in front of him.

"Jewels worth thirty thousand in the open market are not worth seven thousand when you have to sell them on the quiet," cried Montague Burge, with the angry contempt of an expert who hears a foolish statement on his subject.

Colonel Webling cut the end off his cigar.

"Don't tell me!" cried Mr. Shore-Wardell. "What share do you get? What share does the chief get?"

Colonel Webling nipped the gold band off the cigar.

"I get the same as you; and I have all the danger of hawking about the Continent thirty thousand pounds worth of jewels, of which every dealer has had the exact description from the police," cried Montague Burge.

Colonel Webling had lighted his cigar; he leaned back, savoring its flavor, and watched the wranglers with half-closed eyes, very like a sleepy, uninterested vulture.

"And what does the Chief get for sitting quietly at home and doing nothing?" cried Mr. Shore-Wardell.

"Doing nothing? What do you call doing nothing? Where should we be without the Chief? Who thought of the Aldington jewels? Who made the plan for getting them? Why everything was his idea—he chose the three of you; he chose the disguises; he fixed the hour to try for the jewels; he got Rutland Gate free of police for you," cried Montague Burge as his anger grew.

"What's that to driving a kidnapped peeress with thirty thousand pounds worth of jewels on her twenty-five miles in a stolen motor brougham, as I did?" cried Mr. Shore-Wardell. "What does the Chief get? Out with it!"

Montague Burge hesitated, then he said: "The Chief hasn't got anything yet. I get him money when he wires that he's sending for it. His share is two thousand."

"Two thousand! Two! Monstrous! Oh, we must have some of that two thousand—a thousand of it—yes, a thousand," cried Mr. Shore-Wardell. "Hand it over."

"You don't suppose I've got it in the house. I know too much about my company," sneered Montague Burge. "The money's in the bank."

"What does that matter? You can write us cheques," said Mr. Shore-Wardell.

"Not me," said Montague Burge.

"Then we'll make you. Won't we, Colonel?" cried Mr. Shore-Wardell.

Colonel Webling breathed out a cloud of cigar smoke, shook his head, and said curtly, "I won't. You've been well paid for your night's work—four hours was all we spent on it. What does it matter how much anybody else gets?"

"Fair's fair, Colonel Webling. We should share and share alike. We ran all the risks," cried Mr. Shore-Wardell.

His voice came squeaking out of a crimson mask of greed.

"Nonsense! Why should the Chief run any risk? Generals don't run risks. Where would armies be, if they did? You've got plenty," said Colonel Webling.

"Yes, yes; there was weeks of work in that plan. And you're not the only people to be paid. There was getting the police out of Rutland Gate; I don't know who did it, or how it was done, but you bet it cost money; and the Chief pays for that himself. And the footman who always sits beside Lady Aldington's chauffeur; you don't suppose it cost nothing to get him away. The Chief pays for that, too," said Montague Burge.

"Fifty pounds would cover all those little jobs," said Mr. Shore-Wardell.

"Not it," said Montague Burge.

"And why should Colonel Webling have fifteen hundred and I only a thousand? I ran just the same risk as he," cried Mr. Shore-Wardell more shrilly than ever.

"That was the Chief's arrangement. He said the money was to be divided like that because the Colonel was in charge of the enterprise. If you don't like it, you can talk to the Chief about it," said Montague Burge.

The Colonel laughed a short, barking laugh: "If I hadn't been there, the jewels would have been in Lord Aldington's safe, and you and that prize-fighter fellow—what's his name? Billson—would be in prison," he said. "You were wobbly, Shore-Wardell—devilish wobbly; and Billson would have tried to pull the chauffeur off his seat from the wrong side of the brougham—the fool! Besides, the leader always gets a larger share of the loot than his men—always—it's the rule."

"Yes, yes; what's the good of haggling? After all you were told you would get eight hundred, and you get a thousand. What are you grumbling about?" said Montague Burge.

"It's the unfairness," muttered Mr. Shore-Wardell; and he seemed to fall into a profound reflection, his eyes still bright with greed.

Montague Burge rose, took a bottle of brandy and a syphon from the sideboard, and set them on the table. They filled their glasses and fell to talk-

ing peacefully. Montague Burge and Colonel Web-ling drank freely; Mr. Shore-Wardell seemed to be in an ascetic mood, he helped himself to soda out of all proportion to the brandy in his glass. He took but little share in the animated talk of his two companions; indeed, now and again, some question from them showed that he had not been listening to it. He seemed absorbed in some train of thought of his own; but every now and then he looked sharply at the brandy bottle, as if he were marking how liquor sank in it.

The brandy had sunk half-way down the bottle when of a sudden he joined in the talk with a cheerful affability. It was under his guidance that it came back to the subject of the Aldington emeralds.

Presently he said carelessly, "I suppose you just give the Chief a cheque for his share, Burge? You don't bother about getting twenties and tenners for him?"

Montague Burge hesitated, then he said: "Not much. The Chief will get his two thousand in fivers—four hundred fivers. There never was anyone so careful as the Chief."

"Then I'll bet that he doesn't come for them on foot. Does he come in a motor car?" said Mr. Shore-Wardell.

Montague Burge hesitated again: "You don't suppose the Chief comes for them himself. The

notes pass through three hands before the Chief gets them. I get them from the bank. Three evenings later the secretary of a friend of the Chief's comes to me for them; and his employer hands them on to the Chief. No one could ever prove that the Chief had one of them from me. And I'll bet that most of those fivers are changed into gold before they're paid into his bank. Oh, there's no catching the Chief!"

The brandy indeed seemed to have loosened Montague Burge's tongue. It was not often that it wagged so freely.

"What's the secretary like?" said Mr. Shore-Wardell in the affable tone of one making polite conversation.

"Oh, a fair-haired young fellow—with a fair mustache," said Montague Burge.

"Then if I saw a fair-haired young fellow, with a fair mustache coming out of your office at Rawnsley's Emporium, carrying a neat, square package, I should know that he had four hundred five-pound notes on him," said Mr. Shore-Wardell and he chuckled.

"Yes, if you saw him come out of my office at Rawnsley's," said Montague Burge cautiously.

"Ah, he comes here, does he?" said Mr. Shore-Wardell sharply.

"I never said so. You want to know too much. Money—that kind of money doesn't bear too much

talking about," said Montague Burge in the tone of irritation of a man who has said too much.

"Curiosity—idle curiosity," said Mr. Shore-Wardell with a careless wave of the hands; and he emptied his glass and rose.

"You're not going?" said Montague Burge, with no great heartiness.

"I'm afraid I must be off—get in a rubber or two before I go to bed—make me sleep better," said Mr. Shore-Wardell.

Montague Burge did not press him to stay. He went out into the hall with him, found his hat and stick for him, and let him out of the house.

He came back to the dining-room frowning: "There's no satisfying that fellow," he said. "If it had been ten thousand, he'd have asked for more."

"He would," said Colonel Webling. "And one of these days he'll try to play us some dirty trick."

"Yes; it's a pity he's so useful. You see, we really got Lady Aldington's habits from him."

"It was odd how his greediness sobered him. I'm hanged if it wasn't like a cold plunge to him. But he needs watching."

"And he'll be watched all right," said Montague Burge; and he rose and opened the door to freshen the air of the room.

"Of course at this game you have to take what you can get at in the way of assistants. That prize-fighter fellow—he's an awkward brute to have to

deal with. I'm glad he didn't get the chance of seeing my face the other night," said Colonel Webling.

"Billson has an awkward temper. His friends say that out of the ring he can't keep it for twenty minutes on end. If he'd only the sense to keep straight and train, he could be champion of the world. But no one will train him now. At the end of a fortnight he bashes his trainer and goes off on the drink. He takes a lot of managing. It's an infernal nuisance having to work with such cattle," said Montague Burge with a lowering face.

"He's been in a good many things," said Colonel Webling, watching him.

"Too many. Fortunately he's a sulky drinker, or he'd have started bragging about one of them and made no end of trouble——"

"For himself. He's never seen my face; and I always have an alibi—a very sound alibi."

"He's seen mine," said Montague Burge.

"Well I shall be very pleased to knock the insubordinate dog on the head whenever the Chief wants it doing—for a consideration of course," said Colonel Webling, smiling pleasantly.

"About a couple of hundred?"

"Three," said Colonel Webling.

"I'll let the Chief know."

Colonel Webling mixed himself another brandy and soda, sipped it, and said: "Why did you tell

Shore-Wardell that yarn about the Chief and the fivers? I'm hanged if he didn't swallow it!"

"The Chief's instructions are that I'm never to refuse information to any of you. I'm always to be ready with plenty as long as it's wrong," said Montague Burge.

"Mauleverer's a very clever man. I'm glad I met him," said Colonel Webling in a tone of profound satisfaction.

"I've never set eyes on him," said Montague Burge.

"The deuce you haven't!" said Colonel Webling.

CHAPTER V

AT RAWNSLEY'S EMPORIUM

MR. RAWNSLEY, founder and proprietor of Rawnsley's, was at work next morning in his comfortable, even luxurious, panelled office in the heart of the Emporium. He was a venerable man of from fifty-five to sixty; indeed there were few men in London of a more venerable air. His abundant, silky, white hair was long, and his long, flowing white beard spread out widely over his chest. But his venerable face was by no means a weak one: the lips, though rather thick, were firm; his eyes were keen; and his Roman nose was full of character. He had a more kindly expression than is common in men who have built up a big business; but that was all the weakness that showed in him. That morning he had interviewed such of his chiefs of departments as had wished to consult him, and was now leisurely dictating to Nancy Weston answers to the few letters with which those heads of departments had been unable to deal.

As she sat at her desk taking down the letters in

shorthand, her face was composed and grave as befitted one engaged in a serious task. But now and again it broke into a ravishing smile at some jest of her employer's; for no matter how difficult or important the business with which he was dealing, Mr. Rawnsley would have his joke. His lawyer, an uncommonly shrewd man, ascribed much of his success in business to the fact that no rival had ever been able to disturb his imperturbable good humor.

He had just finished dictating a letter when there came a knock at the door and Montague Burge entered.

"Good morning, Mr. Burge. Type those letters out, Miss Weston; and when I've finished with Mr. Burge come back and take some more," said Mr. Rawnsley.

Nancy rose and left the room, careful not to meet the discomfiting eyes of Montague Burge. He always looked at her as if he were burning to devour her.

The door closed behind her; and Mr. Rawnsley said in a rich, melodious voice: "Well, did you pay your fellow conspirators all right?"

"Yes; I gave them their money," said Montague Burge, not very cheerfully.

"Then that affair's closed," said Mr. Rawnsley quite cheerfully.

"I don't know about that. Shore-Wardell grumbled a good deal. He said that the Chief was get-

ting more than his share, since we had run all the risks, while he sat quietly at home."

"Gay but greedy—Shore-Wardell. What risk does the idiot think he ran? The Chief gets his two thousand for making it perfectly safe for Shore-Wardell to kidnap Lady Aldington and strip her of her jewels. When the Chief had done his work, three schoolboys could have done the rest—if they'd had the muscle and one of them could have driven a motor brougham," said Mr. Rawnsley, contemptuously. "Point that out to the greedy idiot next time you see him."

"I did point it out to him, or at least something very like it. But he wasn't satisfied. It's my idea that he means mischief."

"It's one thing to mean mischief and quite another to be able to do it. What does he think he can do?" said Mr. Rawnsley carelessly.

"I don't know. But I'm sure he had some idea in his head; and I think the Chief ought to be told. Shore-Wardell's a much cleverer man than he looks," said Montague Burge, frowning.

"He wouldn't be of any use to the Chief if he weren't, because he wouldn't know exactly what to find out for him. But I'll certainly tell the Chief what you say, for I have a great belief in your judgment," said Mr. Rawnsley, who never lost a chance of showing his appreciation of his lieutenants. "Was Colonel Webling satisfied?"

"Quite. He looked at it that he had got fifteen hundred pounds for four hour's work."

"A very honest man the Colonel in spite of that utter disregard of the rights of property and human life which he acquired in the service of the Sultan. I should say that his word was every bit as good as his bond," said Mr. Rawnsley warmly.

"And he's ready to knock Billson on the head for three hundred whenever the Chief wants it doing," said Montague Burge. "He doesn't like Billson."

"Capital! Capital!" cried Mr. Rawnsley. "Thorough—absolutely thorough." And he laughed a rich, ringing laugh.

He rose and, going to the safe in the corner, brought from it two emerald tiaras and two emerald necklaces and set them on his desk: "The Chief's idea of letting the police photograph our replicas of the Aldington tiara and necklace when they were searching for the stolen ones, and the exhibiting the replicas in our Bond Street branch, has worked again," he said.

"We never had such an advertisement," said Montague Burge, with enthusiasm.

"No; the trouble the police had with the crowds who came to look at them kept forcing the papers to talk about them; and of course the American papers had to take it up, so that now I've got an order from a Pittsburg millionaire of the name of Mallet for a third Aldington necklace and tiara."

"Good," said Montague Burge.

"If we'd had it earlier, we could have distributed the actual Aldington emeralds among three tiaras and three necklaces instead of between these two sets," said Mr. Rawnsley.

"It wouldn't do to run your motor car over these four pieces as you ran it over the first two and smash up the settings again. Our jewelers might think a double accident suspicious," said Montague Burge, doubtfully.

"I should think they would!" cried Mr. Rawnsley impatiently. "No, no; these two sets will go to their purchasers as they are. The police are never likely to hear that the Rajah has replicas of the Aldington jewels. At any rate they won't learn it for a good long while; and by that time our purchases of emeralds will have so confused things that there'll be no tracing anything, to say nothing of the fact that I'm going to have a fire and get our books burnt. But what I want to know is about the emeralds in the ear-rings; can they be used in this third tiara and necklace?"

"Two of the four have been used already," said Montague Burge, taking up a tiara and running his eye over it. "Let's see; here's one of them." He laid his finger on one of the emeralds in the top row of the tiara. Then he picked up the other tiara, ran his eye over it, set it down, picked up one of the necklaces and looked at it, laid his finger on the

third emerald to the right of the centre stone, and said, "Here's the other."

"Burge, you're a wonder," said Mr. Rawnsley.

"Well, every emerald *is* different from every other emerald and every diamond or ruby from every other diamond or ruby. If I've seen a stone once, I remember it. It's a knack," said Montague Burge.

"It's genius," said Mr. Rawnsley.

"No; I can't *help* remembering them," said Montague Burge, a little puzzled.

"Well, well; I always employ men of genius, in their departments; that's how I've got on," said Mr. Rawnsley, cheerfully. "Then I'm to understand that we start this third set four fine stones to the good."

"Yes, that's it. They're worth three thousand or close on it," said Montague Burge.

"Well, we shall get a hundred thousand guineas for these three sets—thanks to the advertisement the world's press has given us. Fifty thousand we spend on stones for them; the Aldington's provide us gratis with another twenty-five thousand pounds worth of stones, so we clear nearly fifty thousand on the transaction. It's very satisfactory—very. Your share will be at least five thousand."

"Yes, guineas," said Montague Burge, in a tone of deep satisfaction.

"Well, in buying the emeralds for this third set, I want you to get them from fresh dealers."

"As far as it's possible, I will," said Montague Burge. "And how would it be when I'm about it to pick up any duplicates I can? We may get an order for another set."

"You're quite right. One millionaire always leads to another. If we don't, this affair will make emeralds the rage, and we shall do well out of them. Besides, the more we buy, the more it will add to the confusion, if the police should ever try to work out our purchases of emeralds," said Mr. Rawnsley.

"There's no fear of their getting on to it," said Montague Burge, confidently.

"Very little; and certainly no signs of it so far. They've got it into their heads that a gang of American crooks stole the Aldington jewels. *We* shan't point out to them that all the business intelligence is not on the other side of the Atlantic. The Chief suggests that I should send a note round the papers saying that we have already sold three replicas of the Aldington jewels; and I will."

"The Chief's a wonder," said Montague Burge. "I hope he'll soon hit on another plan."

"You'll be pleased to hear that the Chief is devoting his time to the study of the important jewels belonging to all the great families in England. We shall soon be making some more replicas," said Mr. Rawnsley cheerfully.

“Well, I’ll be getting down to Hatton Garden. I bought nearly all the first lot of emeralds abroad, of course; and I nearly cleared the Dutch and Hamburg markets of all the stones of the sizes we wanted. So we may as well give England a turn.”

“Certainly, certainly; let’s be patriots this time,” said Mr. Rawnsley, with a cheery laugh.

CHAPTER VI

MONTAGUE BURGE SPOILS HIS OWN GAME

MONTAGUE BURGE stepped into the outer office, shut the door quietly behind him, and stood still, gazing at Nancy Weston at her desk. Nancy did not look up from her typewriter. It was possible that she had not seen him enter. He gazed at her, frowning, hesitating, nervous. He was angry with her for making him feel nervous; and he was angry with himself for feeling nervous.

He bit his lip, and said in tones half cajoling, half threatening: "Look here, are you coming out to dinner with me to-night, or aren't you? It's your last chance."

There was no change in Nancy's face. She went on with her work, absorbed in it, her brow knitted in a faint frown of earnestness. It was plain that she had not heard him. Yet, unless she had been afflicted suddenly with deafness, she could not have failed to hear him.

He made three quick steps towards her, then stood still again, flushed and scowling.

"You little devil! What you want is a lesson!" he said thickly. "There isn't another girl in the building who'd dare—— You've got to learn to be civil—very civil to a partner in the firm you work for. If you're not careful you'll get that lesson sooner than you think—much sooner."

Nancy threw back her head to shake away a little curl which had strayed from its place and was tickling the corner of her eye. It was the prettiest movement; and it sent a thrill through Montague Burge.

Then she took from the machine the letter she had just finished, put in another sheet of paper, and fell again to her swift tapping. It was plain that she had been stricken with a sudden deafness and blindness; that even yet she had not heard the voice of Montague Burge, that she had not even seen him. Nancy may have been ignorant of the proper process of checking marquesses, but she knew how to check the Montague Burges of this world.

He stood trembling a little, moving his rigid fingers backwards and forwards, grinding his teeth softly. He was unused to this long opposition from a girl in Rawnsley's. He was unused to any strong opposition; it was years since anyone had really opposed him.

His spirit was raw with the chafing of anger and thwarted desire; he could have boxed her pretty

ears and shaken the pride out of her, joyfully. But there were a dozen clerks in the next office; and he had to restrain himself. The effort shook him; her figure danced for a moment before his eyes in a red haze and a little foam flowed out upon his lips.

Then came the outburst, hoarse and furious:

"All right! All right! I'm fed up with your side—fed up with it!" he cried. "Swank—pure swank! And you'll come it over me, will you? I'm going to change your tune. I'm going to make you laugh on the other side of your mouth. You silly little fool—you run straight into my little trap; and then you give yourself airs like this. I'm going to give you that lesson now—right away!"

He stood for a moment longer to see whether she would respond to the spur of fear. Nancy's fingers tapped swiftly on; her eyes were glued to the shorthand notes she was copying. With an oath he went to the door in quick, jerky steps, flung out of it and slammed it. He hurried through the next two offices; and when he had passed, the joyful clerks cried to one another that he had been getting "told off" by the old man.

But Montague Burge was not considering appearances; he was not considering anything; he was one burning frenzy to trample and crush. It was faintly present in his mind that as a boy he had

greatly enjoyed stamping on any butterfly he caught. . . . He would stamp on this butterfly. . . . He had caught her all right. . . . The little fool had flown bang into the net. . . . He'd stamp on her. . . . He wouldn't leave a flutter in her.

He dashed into his office, tore open a drawer, snatched up a bank-book in it, thrust it into his pocket, jammed on his hat, and hurried out into the High Street.

As the door of her office banged behind him, Nancy heaved a sigh of relief. It had been a strain to keep her face impassive and uncomprehending under his threats, for he had frightened her; the wild-rose hue of her cheeks was fainter. She hung idle over her machine, frowning, wondering what harm he could do her. How she did loathe the brute. . . . On her very first day at Rawnsley's she had not failed to notice and resent his leering eye. . . . And then his offensive, jocular familiarity. . . . What a cad he was! . . . And what a brute! . . . And then his invitations to dine with him and go to the theatre. . . . As if she would go to the theatre with a cad like that! . . . And the insulting things he had said when he found that she did not mean to go out with him. . . . And the way he had given her work to do after office hours which kept her hard at it till eleven and twelve o'clock at night. . . . But Mr. Rawnsley had stopped that. . . . And then the time the beast had tried to kiss her. . . .

Oh, she was glad she had hit him—hard. . . . How she did loathe him!

In truth the love-making of Montague Burge had at first partaken in about equal degrees of the methods of an old-time plantation overseer making love to a slave-girl in one of his gangs and of the methods of a Russian officer and gentleman making love to a political prisoner on her way to Siberia. Then he had been checked by the discovery that Mr. Rawnsley took an interest in her; and had declined with great chagrin, since he had hitherto found those other methods most successful in the shops he had adorned, on more conventional and less speedy methods. He had been effusive with fulsome compliments whenever he chanced on her; and he had made many occasions of chancing on her. He had slipped boxes of chocolates and small trinkets, with letters, into her desk. His chocolates, his trinkets, and his letters came back to him without a word. Nancy showed no faintest sign of gratitude; her very greeting, when she was forced to greet him, was barely civil.

Then one evening he had met her on the stairs as she was leaving work, and tried to kiss her. He had been signally discomfited. Long years of sedentary life and unused muscles had left him uncommonly flabby. Nancy had been an excellent lawn-tennis and hockey player, for a girl, before she had come to London the previous November. She had

taken a long walk every Sunday during the winter; and for some time she had been doing Swedish exercises she had learned from a book, morning and evening, to keep her muscles hard against the time when she should again be playing games. In five seconds Montague Burge was rubbing a stinging cheek, and swearing, as he watched her fly down the bottom flight of stairs. It was this last defeat which had driven him to a drastic device he had found successful once before; she had fallen into his trap; and now in his sudden fury to crush her he was throwing away the advantage he had gained.

Nancy ended her reflections with a grimace of disgust, and turned again to her typewriting. When she had finished typing out the letters, she took them to Mr. Rawnsley. He read them through, signed them, and dictated some more. He was in the middle of the fifth letter when the door opened and Montague Burge came hurriedly in followed by a clean-shaven man who wore a very disturbed and troubled air. Nancy recognized him as the cashier who had been so polite to her when she had cashed some cheques for Montague Burge at the bank in the High Street.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr. Rawnsley," said Montague Burge. "But it's a serious matter—forgery. The endorsement of the firm has been forged on three open cheques; and they've been cashed. The

amount is eleven, four, six. Is this the girl?" he said to the cashier, pointing to Nancy.

The cashier looked at Nancy with a very miserable air, hesitated, and then stammered, "Y-y-es. I-I'm afraid that is the young l-l-lady."

"I thought so," cried Montague Burge triumphantly. I wondered what she was doing in my office last Thursday."

"B-but I wasn't in Mr. Burge's office last Thursday—or ever!" cried the startled Nancy, wondering what was the trouble.

"Oh, weren't you?" said Montague Burge. "It's as plain as a pike-staff!" he went on, turning to Mr. Rawnsley. "This girl stole the cheques, forged the endorsements, and cashed them. It's a matter for the police."

"B-b-but I didn't!" cried Nancy, beginning to grasp her peril. "Mr. Burge brought the——"

"One moment! One moment, Miss Weston!" cried Mr. Rawnsley in a loud voice. "Are you going off your head, Burge? Or is it merely your memory that's going? You brought me those three cheques yourself last Thursday, and I endorsed them."

There was a faint gasp of relief from the cashier; and the color began to return to Nancy's cheeks. She did not understand the matter; but she gathered that Mr. Rawnsley had come to her rescue.

"I—I brought the cheques to you?" stammered

Montague Burge, astounded; and he stood staring open-mouthed at his employer.

"On Thursday morning—or was it Friday?—and I sent Miss Weston to the bank myself to cash them for me," said Mr. Rawnsley firmly.

"B-b-but——" stammered Montague Burge.

"I'm sorry that you've been bothered like this for nothing, Mr. Carruthers—just at the busiest part of the day, too," said Mr. Rawnsley, suavely, to the bank cashier; and he rang the electric bell on his desk.

Montague Burge glared at his employer.

"No trouble—no trouble—mistakes will happen. And I'm glad—very glad indeed that it was a mistake," said the cashier, looking at Nancy.

"The fact is, Mr. Burge works so hard and carries so many things in his mind that he can't be expected to remember everything. The fact that he brought the cheques to me slipped his memory," said Mr. Rawnsley, rising.

A clerk came in; Mr. Rawnsley shook hands warmly with the cashier, and bade the clerk conduct him through the building to one of the High Street entrances.

As the door closed behind them, he said, sharply, "Now you can tell me what did happen."

"I saw her come out of my office——" cried Montague Burge.

"Not you, Burge! Not you! I've heard your

story. I want the true one. What happened, Miss Weston?" said Mr. Rawnsley.

"Mr. Burge came up to me in my office on Thursday morning, before you came, sir, and gave me the three cheques, and told me to write the name of the firm on the back of them, and take them round to the bank and cash them; and I did it," said Nancy.

Mr. Rawnsley laughed: "You little duffer! You committed forgery!" he cried. "You must never write any name but your own on a cheque—never. But what was your game, Burge? What was the object of your little trap?"

Montague Burge could only glare at him with furious eyes.

A sudden look of enlightenment brightened Mr. Rawnsley's face and he smiled. Then he frowned and said angrily: "Oh, I see the game. Has this dog been making love to you, Miss Weston?"

"He—he has been—bothering me a good deal," said Nancy, blushing.

"And you were irresponsible? You wouldn't have anything to do with him?" said Mr. Rawnsley.

"No, I wouldn't!" cried Nancy, and her eyes flashed.

"Oh, Burge, Burge, what a devil you are with the ladies," said Mr. Rawnsley, in a hard, jeering voice; and his benevolent eyes, grown extraordinarily hard and cruel and burning, scorched his wretched manager.

There was a choking sound from the throat of Montague Burge.

"So when you found your manly beauty wasn't appreciated, you were going to revenge yourself by this infernal trick, were you?" said Mr. Rawnsley; and he waited for an answer.

Montague Burge's mouth opened, but no answer came from it.

"You're a very dirty scoundrel, Burge. No one but a wretched cur would try such a game on a woman," said Mr. Rawnsley, with shriveling scorn. Then he banged down his hand on his desk and roared: "Let me catch you at it again, and I'll smash you, you dog!"

Montague Burge found his voice. He was at the end of his patience, his prudence, all regard for consequences. By the same stroke he had lost Nancy for good and all, and he had lost the vengeance which should have soothed his torn heart. He looked at the man who had balked him, with the raging eyes of a baited tiger; that that man should call him to account was the last straw.

"Smash me! You smash me?" he snarled. "You be careful what you're talking about! You! You, Rawnsley!"

"I can smash you, and if you give me any reason to—any reason—I will," said Mr. Rawnsley.

His voice had gone quiet, almost gentle; his words came slow but very clear, almost piercing.

And the odd thing was that for all his gentleness he looked by far the more dangerous of the two. It might have been the gleam in his eyes; they shone with the hard shine of polished metal.

But Montague Burge was beyond perceiving anything.

"And you'll smash yourself with me!" he howled, furiously. "You can take your oath to that! It's for you to look out—not me! I know too much to be frightened by you! You threaten? Swank—that's what that is! Just swank! I've taken my precautions all right; and you bear it in mind, will you? We sink or swim together, we do! You bear it in mind, you silly, white-headed, old mug!"

His voice had started hoarse and loud and blustering; on the last words it suddenly wore thin and faint. He was at the end of his emotions, at the end of everything. He flung out of the room and banged the door behind him.

Mr. Rawnsley looked at the slammed door, scowling, ugly, dangerous. Then he laughed softly and slowly, a laugh which made Nancy shiver, it was so charged with wicked menace.

Then he looked at Nancy, pale and trembling in her terror of these furious men; and his eyes turned soft. He smiled and said: "Well, you are a little duffer. Why didn't you tell me that that dog was persecuting you?"

"I didn't like to," said Nancy, flushing faintly.

"And so you committed forgery. I had to lie pretty freely to get you out of that mess," he said, smiling.

"Yes; and oh, it was good of you, sir!" she cried, and burst into tears.

Mr. Rawnsley looked at her; and his face grew faintly calculating: "Some day I may ask you to do something for me—something important. Will you do it?" he said, slowly.

"Yes, I will—anything!" cried Nancy.

Mr. Rawnsley looked at the closed door; and his face hardened again. Then he said between his teeth, half to himself:

"The good Burge forgets the important factor in the situation—a certain Colonel—late of the Ottoman army."

CHAPTER VII

MR. SHORE-WARDELL SPENDS A BUSY DAY

MR. SHORE-WARDELL regulated his life by a golden rule; he never rose before noon—as much later as sleepiness might direct, but never before. On the 22nd of May he broke that golden rule for the first time in years; he rose at half-past nine. It was not virtue which urged him to this praiseworthy breach of his golden practice; it was greed. Greed had kept him lying awake for two hours the night before; and he awoke still simmering with that passion. The thought of the two thousand pounds which were going to their Chief as his share of the Aldington spoil, filled his mind. It filled it painfully; he could not bear to think of it. The pain of the thought drove him from his bed—he must be up and doing.

It was greed also which had stirred him to an unwonted pitch of observation in a suburb. As a rule, he observed nothing in a suburb, not even the women, though he was of a gallant nature. But the night before, on leaving 11 Malkin Lane, he had observed a board set up in the garden of a house a few doors lower down on the opposite side of the

road. He had crossed the road and learned that 16 Malkin Lane was to be let furnished; and that Messrs. Turnbull & Grigg had the letting of it. He stood for a little while in front of No. 16 in a thoughtful consideration; his mind was full of the knowledge, so carelessly imparted to it by Montague Burge, that in the course of the next three nights there would be two thousand pounds, in five-pound notes, moving up or down Malkin Lane and only protected by a fair-haired young man with a fair mustache.

One of the results of his thoughtful consideration of No. 16 was that while Montague Burge was sitting in his locked office, with his face buried in his hands, striving to compose himself, Mr. Shore-Wardell was sitting in the office of Messrs. Turnbull and Griggs.

His beaming pink face had quite lost the querulousness of the night before; he was a large, lately-fed, good-humored baby with a gurgling chuckle. He beamed and chuckled over the business which had brought him to Mr. Turnbull, his need for a small furnished house. His doctor had ordered him to sleep out of London for the good of his nerves; and the furnished house must be in a very quiet street free from any disturbing traffic.

Mr. Turnbull, whose rich, red, old-English face, probably ancestral, would certainly have turned any bull at full speed towards him, had he got into the

same field with it, was deeply impressed by the air and dress and conversation of this new client, since Mr. Shore-Wardell had mentioned casually that a duke had offered to lend him a cottage in Berkshire, a marquess a small house in Bucks, both of which had been too far from town for him. Heavily deferential, Mr. Turnbull ran his finger down the pages of his ledger, proposing house after house, expatiating on the advantages of each. He offered houses in Ravenscourt Park, Bedford Park, Grove Park and Chiswick Park. Mr. Shore-Wardell rejected them one after another with a considerable fertility of excuse. Both his prudence and his obstinacy were concerned not to give Mr. Turnbull a lead; he was sure that No. 16 Malkin Lane was somewhere or other in that book, sooner or later he must come to it.

At last he did come to it; he said, in a doubtful tone: "There's a house in Malkin Lane, but it's not very well furnished."

"Malkin Lane? Where is Malkin Lane? It's an attractive name," said Mr. Shore-Wardell.

"It's three or four turnings along on the right. It leads down to the Mall."

"Ah, charming—charming—a punning name—some eighteenth-century wag. I like the name; and if it's really quiet, the situation is convenient—as near town as I can hope to find a house, and close to the main road."

"It's quiet enough," said Mr. Turnbull.

"Good—good—can I see it?"

Mr. Turnbull looked at him and hesitated; then he saw his way to getting a higher rent from this friend of dukes than he would from an ordinary tenant: "I'll come and show it to you," he said. "My partner's here."

Mr. Shore-Wardell thanked him with effusion. They got into a taxicab that was waiting and drove to Malkin Lane. Mr. Shore-Wardell sat well back in the taxicab, which he had chosen for its depth, though he had very little fear that Montague Burge would see him; he must be busy in his office. But it was well to take no chances.

He went over the house, beaming, but with great thoroughness. He wished to convey to Mr. Turnbull the strong impression that he was going to use the house as his quiet sleeping-place night after night with the utmost regularity; and he conveyed that impression. Having examined it with this thoroughness, he agreed to take it for three months at four guineas a week, more than the house-agent had expected to get; and having paid a month's rent in advance and given the names of two peers as references, Mr. Turnbull made no objection to his entering on immediate occupation, and then and there handed the latch-key over to him. He undertook to have the water turned on that afternoon. Both of them were quite satisfied with the arrange-

ment: Mr. Shore-Wardell had the post of observation he wanted; and Mr. Turnbull had let the house for a guinea a week more than he had expected to get for it.

Mr. Shore-Wardell drove back to town, beaming still. He lunched at one of his clubs; but after it he did not at once betake himself to bridge, as was his custom; he went to his rooms in Jermyn Street, and came out of them carrying a light grey overcoat on his arm. He took a taxicab, drove to the Commercial Road, Whitechapel, and got out of it fifty yards from Wonderland. He walked to that famous home of London boxing; five shillings to the clerk at the box office gave him what he wanted, the address of Crinkly Billson; and he took another taxicab to Waterloo Station.

From Waterloo he took a train to Vauxhall; but whereas he entered the train clean-shaven, he came out of it wearing a full grey beard; and he had put on his light grey overcoat. He walked from the station to 41 Plinlimmon Road; and a singularly ill-smelling landlady informed him that Mr. Billson was out, but that Mrs. Billson was at home, and led him up to a frowsy little sitting-room on the third floor. There he found the prizefighter's wife, a timid, suppressed young woman, mending a rent in one of the most gorgeous fancy vests in all South London.

Mr. Shore-Wardell told her that he wished to see

her husband on private business with the least possible delay; and saying that she thought that she would find him in the saloon bar of the Blue Boar just round the corner, she hurried away to bring him.

Mr. Shore-Wardell made haste to open a window. It did not open easily; neither the prizefighter nor his wife appeared to have needed fresh air for some weeks. Then he lighted a cigar, since there was a curious musky smell in the room, as if it were the lair of one of the large carnivora. He had not long to wait; a heavy man came bounding up the stairs, with a light enough step, but shaking the house by his mere weight, and Crinkly Billson—he had acquired the name of Crinkly from the singular crinkly frizziness of his black hair—came into the room.

The experts of the ring said that it only rested with himself for Crinkly Billson to become the champion of the world. Standing six feet four in his stockings, broad and thick in proportion, bull-necked, big-limbed, and as quick as a cat, there certainly appeared no physical reason why he should not realize their dream. The reasons were temperamental—his villainous temper and his passion for drink.

He started slightly at the sight of Mr. Shore-Wardell's grey beard, and greeted him curtly. As he considered his curious red-brown, restless eye,

his short combative nose, his thick lips with their odd, ugly twitching, the liquorish flush on his flat cheeks, and his mastiff jowl, Mr. Shore-Wardell perceived that he was to have an awkward ally, hard to manage. But in the pursuit of money, he never quailed:

"Can anyone hear us? Because I've come to talk about a little motor ride we took with a lady about a month ago," he said suavely.

"Wot abaht it?" growled the prizefighter in a weak, husky voice quite out of keeping with his huge body; and his scowling face was tigerish.

"Those jewels sold for seven thousand pounds. Did you get your fair share of that seven thousand pounds—considering the risk you ran? I didn't," said Mr. Shore-Wardell.

"Seven thousand pounds! Not me. I never got no fair share, I didn't! An' that scraggin' the shuvver! There ain't three men in London as could er pulled him out er 'is seat by 'is silly neck!" cried the pugilist; and he fell to cursing a man called Wilson, for having done him in the eye, huskily, viciously, and at length.

This was the spirit Mr. Shore-Wardell wanted. He perceived that Wilson and Montague Burge were one. He expressed the deep sympathy of a fellow sufferer with the pugilist, and very soon had him raging as furiously as any one could desire. He was going to bash Wilson; he was going to dance

on him; he was going to knock his head off; he was going to break every bone in his body. Mr. Shore-Wardell observed his rage with keen pleasure; if ever he should think it good to disembarass the world, and himself, of Montague Burge, here was the man who would rush at the chance of doing it.

But when at last the weak voice of the raging pugilist sank to a vicious hissing, Mr. Shore-Wardell got to business. He told him that there was a good chance of getting square with Wilson, and at the same time of getting their fair share of the Aldington loot. One night during the next week two thousand pounds of it would be in a lonely, empty lane in the hands of a fair-haired secretary. The plan was made; everything was ready to seize the two thousand pounds except the man to knock the fair-haired secretary down and take the money. Would Billson be the man?

Would he? He expressed his burning desire to sally forth at once and out the blighter, with a vigor that warmed Mr. Shore-Wardell's heart.

He explained that it was not a matter of instant action, that the messenger of their unknown chief might indeed come to hand that very night, but they might have to wait, keeping a patient and sober vigil, night after night for a week. The pugilist said he was willing to wait twenty nights to get square with Wilson. Mr. Shore-Wardell bade him meet him at the Hammersmith end of Hammer-

smith Bridge at nine that night, and follow him, without speaking to him, to the place of their vigil. As he was leaving the room, Mr. Shore-Wardell turned and said: "By the way, my name is Burge—Montague Burge. You won't forget."

"Nah," said the pugilist.

Mr. Shore-Wardell took the train to Waterloo and arrived there clean-shaven again. He went to his rooms, left his overcoat, betook himself to his club, and in the contented frame of mind of a man who has already done his day's work, and that a good one, settled down to bridge. He played till a quarter to eight and then had an excellent dinner.

At a few minutes to nine he stepped out of a taxicab at Hammersmith Broadway and walked briskly down to the bridge. He was clean-shaven, but on his way to the bridge he turned into an empty side street and came out of it bearded. At the end of the bridge he saw the big figure of the pugilist. He turned and went along the Mall. The pugilist followed him, some twenty yards behind. When they came into Malkin Lane it was empty. Mr. Shore-Wardell opened the door of No. 16, went in, and waited inside the door for the pugilist. They went into the dining-room.

Mr. Shore-Wardell drew a bottle of whiskey from his overcoat pocket and set it on the table. From another pocket he took a large cigar case and set it beside the whiskey. He brought a jug of water,

glasses, and a corkscrew from the pantry. They mixed themselves drinks, lighted cigars, and sat down in the bow window to keep their watch.

At first, as the last of the dusk deepened to darkness, Mr. Shore-Wardell talked. Presently he found that the pugilist could not talk, though he was affable to him on his own subject, the prize-ring; neither could he be talked to. Then they were silent, expectant, eager. Mr. Shore-Wardell's sensibility was ruffled by the fact that the pugilist had brought with him the musky smell from his rooms in the Plinlimmon Road. It was not only in expression that he resembled the large carnivora. The hours passed slowly, but not very slowly, to Mr. Shore-Wardell; he was too excited to find them very slow. No fair-haired messenger came to No. 11. Since Montague Burge did not live there and the house was empty, it was not to be wondered at.

At midnight the pugilist began to grow fidgety, shuffling his feet and muttering that it was no go.

At half-past twelve Mr. Shore-Wardell rose and said: "No; he won't come to-night. We must watch tomorrow."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MARQUESS

NANCY had been seeing the Marquess of Drysdale often. It seemed to her that it must be a prerogative of marquesses to dispense with invitations. If he did not come to tea on three days in the week, he came on four, always uninvited. At his first coming her uncle had awakened with a quite sudden briskness from his usual inventive trance, and had adopted towards him an attitude of cold, but quite polite, suspicion. The Marquess, though she had gathered, from the clearness with which he had seen objects up and down the river, that he enjoyed excellent sight, failed utterly to perceive that attitude.

Later her uncle had abandoned it and become his usual, amiable self. Perhaps he had found the solemnity of the Marquess reassuring. It did inspire confidence. After tea he had gone down to his work in his room off the power-house, and left them together. The Marquess had stayed on for an hour, and Nancy had found the hour short.

At supper that night her uncle had once more

awakened suddenly from his inventive trance, and observed that, though marquesses as a rule were not desirable acquaintances for a girl who earned her own living, the Marquess of Drysdale seemed a very serious young man.

"He would come to tea, uncle," said Nancy. "I really couldn't stop him."

"I should say that he had considerable force of character," said her uncle.

"Yes; I suppose that's what it is," said Nancy, rather doubtfully. "I should have said it was cheek, if he hadn't been a marquess. But of course one doesn't know about marquesses. They may be different."

"Possibly—possibly," said her uncle. "But I suppose they're quite human." He paused, then added: "Though I must say that I have never come across so much solemnity before in one human being. He has enough to go round the whole Bench of Bishops."

"Yes, he has," said Nancy.

The more she saw of the Marquess the more his solemnity puzzled her: it was so inconsistent with the joyous, infectious laughter into which he would break suddenly, and for no apparent reason. At least Nancy could not often trace the connection between the laugh and what he had been saying, or she had been saying. But for his solemnity the connection might have been plain enough; as it was,

she could not bring herself to believe that anyone so solemn, and a marquess, too, could be justified in laughing as he did.

Her perplexity, however, did not prevent her from laughing often and heartily at him, or rather at things he said, inconsistent with his seriousness. Only she would often check herself before she had laughed her laugh out, with a sense of guilt; she felt that it could not be right to laugh at a marquess endowed by heaven with this great gift of solemnity. It was a relief to realize that it was his fault, that he made her laugh. He took her laughter very well; sometimes, indeed, his solemn, pained expression would break down, and he would smile his charming smile, or laugh with her.

After a while she found that his solemnity was, as it were, a veil between them, that it was impossible to grow intimate with so solemn a person. She did not know whether to be glad or sorry for it, whether she wanted to grow very intimate with him or not. After all, as she told herself more than once, he was a marquess, and she was a typist in Rawnsley's Emporium. Besides, he was going to marry the most beautiful woman in Europe.

She was glad that he had told her this, because after all, he was very good-looking in his curious, uncommon style. . . . She had never heard anyone talk in such an interesting way. . . . Indeed, she

had not known that anyone did talk in such an interesting way; and she liked it very much. . . . The fact that he was going to marry the most beautiful woman in Europe seemed somehow to keep things straight. . . . It prevented her from getting very much interested in him. . . . She fancied that it was not difficult for people to get very much interested indeed in him.

At the same time she found that, without ever having set eyes on her, she had taken a dislike to the most beautiful woman in Europe.

Still, if she did not grow very intimate with him, it was very pleasant to have such a friend. He was beginning to change life for her; it was no longer dull. He talked to her about everything that came into his head, always as if she were a sensible person, never as if she were merely a pretty girl; and she liked it. Sometimes, indeed, she could not follow him; he used words she did not understand. She sometimes thought that she ought to buy a dictionary and look them out afterwards. She feared that she was losing a chance of improving her mind. She did not, however, buy a dictionary.

Though the Marquess seemed to find invitations unnecessary, he seemed to feel himself under a strong obligation to return their hospitality. The third time he came to tea he invited them to dine with him at the Ritz and go to the theatre afterwards. Nancy's eyes brightened, but her uncle said that

such dissipation would spoil his work for the day after it.

The Marquess looked solemnly at Nancy and said: "But Miss Weston—surely we ought to try to improve her mind."

Nancy flushed, and her eyes flashed at the Marquess. He gazed at her solemnly, unabashed.

"There is that," said her uncle. "Nancy must be deeply sensible of your kind interest in her education."

The Marquess laughed his sudden, joyous laugh; and they both laughed with him. They always did. Then he proceeded to set forth at length, and with an eloquence that must have been very useful to him in the House of Lords, a good score of reasons why they should accept his invitation. He kept his eyes on her uncle in a solemn, unrelenting stare.

At the end of the oration her uncle, apparently a little dazed, accepted the invitation with some reluctance. Then he looked at his hands, which bore some ingrained traces of invention, and said gloomily, "I shall have to go to a confounded manicurist."

Nancy was delighted by the prospect of going to the theatre; but, ungratefully, she was a little vexed that the Marquess should have once more got his way. He always seemed to get it.

She fixed the Thursday evening of the next week. The Marquess would have had it sooner; but she had to acquire a frock to wear at that dinner and

theatre. The creation of her country dressmaker would not be worthy of the Ritz. It would be a struggle to acquire a frock which would look like the right frock; the right frock itself was quite beyond her.

She pondered the matter with a frowning brow during supper; and her uncle, finding her so silent, asked her what ailed her.

"I'm thinking about my frock for Thursday. I shall have to get one, you know," said Nancy.

"Of course you will," said her uncle.

He rose, went to his desk in the corner of the room, opened it, and gave her a ten-pound note.

"This is for the frock," he said. "I think I should get something simple."

"Oh! All this, uncle!" cried Nancy, who had never been the possessor of so large a sum at any time in her life before. "Thank you so much. But—but—can you spare it?"

"Oh, yes. Some of my inventions bring me in a good deal of money, Rawnsley tells me. You're to spend all of it on the frock. I suppose you know where to get it."

"I shall get it at the Emporium," said Nancy. "You see I shall get the material at nearly cost price because I work there."

"But the style?" said her uncle, doubtfully.

"Oh, I shall see to that myself. I know exactly what I want, you see."

Her uncle looked at her thoughtfully; and then he said: "I've been meaning to speak to you about it. You mustn't let the Marquess turn your head, you know. He's a very well-meaning, serious young fellow, though he doesn't know anything about mechanics; and he's all very well as a friend. But marquesses—er—well—they have to marry—er—politically—in their own circle, you know."

"Oh, that's quite all right," said Nancy. "I quite understand about that. He's going to marry the most beautiful woman in Europe, whoever she is. He told me so."

Her uncle's eyes opened wide; and he looked at her, hard, for half a minute. Then he smiled.

Nancy got her frock at the Emporium; and she got what she wanted. In spite of her beauty, she was not greatly disliked by women; not, that is, by those women with whom she came into contact. Moreover, the fact that she was Mr. Rawnsley's secretary weighed with the heads of the Dress and the Mantle Departments. Besides, he made a point of employing competent people, keenly interested in their work; and they did not often have a customer who stimulated their artistic faculties as Nancy did.

One morning, while it was being made, she brought Mr. Rawnsley his letters to sign.

He took them, and said carelessly: "I'm told that you're getting an expensive frock here. Have you come into money?"

Nancy did not resent the inquiry; she was far too grateful to him for having extricated her from Montague Burge's trap.

"Oh, no; my uncle gave me the money," she said. "We are going to the theatre with the Marquess of Drysdale next Thursday."

Mr. Rawnsley sat suddenly upright in his seat and frowned: "Marquesses are dangerous acquaintances for pretty girls who earn their own living," he said.

"Oh, that's quite all right, sir," said Nancy. "The Marquess is going to marry the most beautiful woman in Europe, whoever she is. He told me so."

Mr. Rawnsley's eyes opened wide; and he looked at Nancy, hard, for half a minute. Then he smiled.

"He seems to have been very frank with you," he said.

"Yes," said Nancy. "He is very frank."

"I've noticed that politicians always are," said Mr. Rawnsley. And he began to sign his letters.

When, on the Thursday evening, Nancy came into the hall of the Ritz, the Marquess stared at her for a moment as if he hardly recognized her. Then he greeted her solemnly; but it was not his usual solemnity; it was of a different quality, somewhat dazed.

During dinner several men, dining at tables near them, kept gazing at her with a rather dazed air.

The women with them gazed at her in quite a different fashion.

Nancy enjoyed the evening greatly; so did the Marquess.

CHAPTER IX

THE MURDER ON THE MALL

THE windows of the dining-room of the house on the Mall were wide open to let in the air of the May evening which was, for that chilly month, uncommonly balmy. At the head of the shortened table sat Mr. Rawnsley, leonine, benevolent; facing him sat a young man with a fair mustache, his son Henry. There was little likeness between them; Henry's was a rather weak face; owing to his mother's neglect when he was a little child his lips were always slightly parted; his pale blue eyes always shrank a little from meeting other eyes. An odd upward twist of the eye-socket and a sharp, tip-tilted nose gave him a waggish air. Indeed, he was renowned for his practical jokes in the best circles of Kew and Mortlake; and Messrs. Hector Ramsay, Turner, and Preece could have recognized him as the waggish young gentleman who had paid them three pounds apiece for playing the early morning, but practical, joke on the sleeping inhabitants of Rutland Gate, Ennismore Gardens, and Montpelier Square.

Mr. Rawnsley was separated from his wife. The scandal which had led to their separation, one of those scandals which insist on attaching themselves to proprietors of Emporia, was an old one; they had been separated for eight years. Once every month, if his father was in London, Henry dined at the house on the Mall; but he lived with his mother.

Mr. Rawnsley was neither greatly interested in Henry, nor very fond of him; there was little in common between them; Henry was his mother's son, not his father's. She had opposed the boy's entering the business as his father had wished; she had declared that she and his father could afford to make Henry a gentleman; and a gentleman he should be. Henry had supported his mother warmly, since being a gentleman did not seem to him to be a laborious occupation, and therefore it was eminently suited to a boy of his simple tastes.

Mr. Rawnsley had yielded gracefully to his wife. He had merely observed to the lawyer through whom they communicated with one another about matters of importance, that you could not make a gentleman out of a boy who had never been to a public school, but had always been under the care of private and inefficient tutors, and had further only associated with the families of retired, or still practising, tradesmen, who dwelt at Kew, Mortlake or on the outskirts of Richmond.

The lawyer had thought that Mr. Rawnsley entertained very narrow and old-fashioned views about what made a gentleman. If a young man who would start with a thousand a year at twenty-one and would one day be worth some ten thousand a year, who had never done a stroke of work in his life, was not a gentleman, who was? Mrs. Rawnsley agreed with the lawyer; and for the last two years Henry had been pursuing that peaceful occupation in Kew, Mortlake, and the outskirts of Richmond.

But it had come about that Mr. Rawnsley was not interested in Henry; one evening a month was as much of his society as he could endure. They had so little to talk about. Always, early in the evening, he would ask him, with great politeness, how he was getting on with being a gentleman; and Henry would answer, in all good faith: "All right, guvner—all right." But Henry made jokes, he did not see them; and on the whole his father was about as fond of him as he was of his fox-terrier, Nick, who sat with him in his study and slept in a basket in his bedroom. That had not prevented him from using Henry's fine talent for conducting a practical joke to get Rutland Gate cleared of police.

They had finished their dinner; and as he set down his first glass of claret after his first sip, he said, "And how is your mother?"

He always asked the question at the first glass of

claret; and as always Henry answered: "She's all right—just the same as usual."

"And quite happy, I trust. She has a grievance; and people of her disposition are generally happy when they have a grievance. You ought to acquire one; but I expect you will," said Andrew Rawnsley lightly.

Henry looked at his father with a puzzled air; he often said to his friends, "I never know what to make of the *guvner's* talk."

His father drank some more claret, and said: "And what do your friends say about that little joke you played for me in Ennismore Gardens and Montpelier Square? Do they see any point in it?"

"I haven't told them. I wasn't to say anything about it for two months; and then I'm to have another twenty," said Henry quickly. "So I haven't told anyone."

"Of course not—of course not—a gentleman wouldn't," said his father. "I'll give you the twenty now. But you mustn't say anything till the two months are up. It might get round to Sir George Wilson that a Rawnsley had arranged his waking up; and he'd see that I had had a hand in it." He took a banknote from his waistcoat pocket and handed it to his son. "Mind, you say nothing for another month, and only then if you feel that you absolutely must brag about it."

"I don't want to brag about it," said Henry, with some heat. "Thanks very much."

His father was sure that he would say nothing for another month; and he thought that, now that he had had the twenty pounds, he had no reason for remembering the affair as long as that; he would most likely forget it altogether. It seemed a needless precaution, since no one had connected the three drunken men with the theft of the Aldington emeralds. But to Andrew Rawnsley no precaution seemed needless.

They were silent a while, drinking their claret.

Henry broke the silence; he said: "I say, guvner, where's that book got to I was reading last time I was here—'Lord Lisdor'? I began it while I was waiting for you to come down to dinner; and I meant to take it away with me, and forgot. Can I have it?"

"It's not a book for a boy. You don't want to learn too much about women," said Andrew Rawnsley.

Henry repudiated the statement that he was a boy, with some heat. He was twenty, getting towards the time when he would be thinking of getting married, he ought not to be treated like a boy. His father was for a long time firm in his refusal; but the more he refused the more he stimulated Henry's obstinacy; and Henry persevered and persevered.

At last, having had his fill of teasing him, his

father said: "Very well, you may have the book. But it's at 11 Malkin Lane. I had a business interview with a man there—a man I didn't want at the Emporium—the other day; and I left it there. You'll have to go and get it."

No. 11 Malkin Lane was the first house in which Andrew Rawnsley had lived on coming to London. He had lived there for five years, founding and building up his Emporium. His wife and Henry thought it a sentimental waste of money to keep the house on; Andrew did not share that opinion: 11 Malkin Lane was useful to him.

He took a bunch of keys from his pocket, slipped one off the ring, and tossed it across the table to Henry. Henry put it in his pocket and thanked him. He talked for a few minutes longer, finished his claret, and bade his father good-night.

As he was going through the door, his father said: "Don't forget to bring back the key. I may want it."

They were fatal words. Had he not spoken them, his son might have forgotten to take the key back, have walked straight up Malkin Lane to the High Road to Kew and safety, instead of down it to the Mall and death.

Andrew Rawnsley poured himself out another glass of claret.

Henry went out of the garden gate, turned to the left, and a dozen yards further on, at the end

of his father's garden wall, turned up Malkin Lane. Whistling softly, he walked quickly, eager to get his book. He did not see the dull red ends of the burning cigars, warning beacons if he had known it, in the bow window of No. 16. He did not see Mr. Shore-Wardell's face, close to the glass of the window as he peered at him, come for a moment into the faint light from the lamp at the corner of the lane. He was looking straight ahead. He turned into the little front garden of No. 11.

As Henry passed No. 16, Mr. Shore-Wardell cried, "That's our man for a fiver."

Their hearts beat high; and as Henry turned into the garden of No. 11 Mr. Shore-Wardell cried, "I told you so!"

There was no need for another word; their plan was laid. They made quickly for the front door, and so missed the fact that Henry let himself into No. 11. It might have given Mr. Shore-Wardell pause. They came out of the front door as Henry went into No. 11.

Crinkly Billson went swiftly down to the Mall and posted himself at the right-hand corner of Malkin Lane from which he had a good view of the lane as far as No. 11, and at the same time a good view of the empty Mall. He had only to cross the bottom of the lane when the Chief's messenger should turn along the Mall, to come upon him from behind. He moved noiselessly; he was wearing

gymnasium shoes with thin india-rubber soles. Mr. Shore-Wardell stayed in the doorway of No. 16, whence he could watch the upper part of the lane and give warning should anyone come down it after the Chief's messenger had left No. 11.

The lane was empty, the Mall was empty, but for the sinister watchers. Henry went into the dining-room and lighted the gas. The book was lying on the table where his father had set it down when his visitor arrived. He did not pick it up at once; he looked round the room. He had had a long struggle with his father before he had obtained his permission to have the book; and the opposition had aroused the mischievous instinct of the practical joker. The room offered no great field for the exercise of his talents; he had to content himself with turning the clock face to the wall, substituting the December for the May card in the calendar on the mantelpiece, and putting a small piece of coal in the ink-pot on the writing-table. Then, with a grin of satisfaction, he came out of the house.

He walked down the Lane towards the Mall to take back the key. From the doorway of No. 16 Mr. Shore-Wardell saw that he was carrying the square package he was expecting; there was not enough light to show that it was only a book. Crinkly Billson from the bottom of the lane also saw that he carried something. Their hearts beat high; the two thousand pounds was almost in their hands.

Henry came down to the Mall and turned along it under the wall of his father's garden. He was hardly conscious of the pugilist; he only saw a figure walking away from him. But as he turned, the pugilist turned too and came leaping along with long, swift, noiseless strides, up behind the unconscious boy.

He was right on him, the life-preserver swinging back for the blow, when Henry turned his head sharply, saw above him the gleaming eyes and bare teeth of the pugilist, and uttered a shrill cry. The blow cut it short. The pugilist had aimed to bring the weapon down on the top of his straw hat, meaning only to stun him. The sudden turn of the head spoiled his aim; and the weapon fell on his bare temple.

Henry dropped in his tracks. The pugilist snatched the book from him as he was falling, bounded round the corner, across Malkin Lane, and into the door of No. 16. Mr. Shore-Wardell shut the door quickly and softly.

"The notes! Have you got the notes?" he hissed.

"Yes," said the pugilist.

"Come on! Come on!" cried Mr. Shore-Wardell, and he caught him by the arm and hurried him down the passage into the back room.

He lighted the gas and said: "Let's have a look."

Billson held out the book.

Mr. Shore-Wardell stared at it and gasped. Billson stared down at it and gasped.

"What's this? The notes!" cried Mr. Shore-Wardell shrilly.

"This is wot I got orf 'im," said the pugilist, staring down at the book with unbelieving eyes.

"You bungling ass!" cried Mr. Shore-Wardell.

"Bungling ass yourself!" said the pugilist with a sudden glint of ferocity in his eyes. He looked down at the book again:

"Blimy, if I ain't done 'im in for a bloomin' book!" he said with a stupid laugh.

CHAPTER X

INSPECTOR GIFFEN GETS A SHOCK

AS the door had closed behind Henry, his father's mouth had opened wide in a prodigious yawn of relief. Then he poured himself out another glass of claret and sipped it slowly. He was thinking, without any great regret, that Henry was of no use to him, or for that matter of no use to any one except to his mother as a somewhat porcupinish pet. His reflections were broken by the entry of his pretty parlor-maid, Annie, bringing spirit tumblers on a tray. He took the hint that she wanted to clear the table, bade her take them to the smoking-room, and rose.

He had taken two steps towards the door when there came a shrill cry from the Mall.

"That's Henry's voice!" he said sharply, and hurried to the window.

The Mall was silent, and, as far as he could see, empty.

Then the note of fear which had rung so high in the cry made him hurry out to it. As he came out of the gate his eye fell on the huddled heap a few

yards from him, at the end of his garden wall. His heart leaped in him, and then sank. He ran to the heap, clutched an arm, and turned the face to the light of the gas-lamp. It was Henry.

He swore under his breath.

Then he dropped the arm and ran to the corner of Malkin Lane. It was empty. He ran back to the river parapet whence he had the furthest view of the Mall right and left. Right and left it was empty.

He came back to Henry, and dropped on one knee beside him. In a few seconds he found the deep dint in the side of his head. He picked him up, and carried him into the house. Annie, standing, wondering, on the top of the steps, shrank back into the hall. He carried the body into the dining-room and laid him at full length on the table. Annie, in the doorway, began to scream. He shouted at her to fetch Pettigrew. His violence cleared her wits; and she ran.

He came quickly out into the hall, went to the telephone, rang up Hammersmith Police Station, and informed the inspector that his son had been murdered in front of his house on the Mall. Then he rang up Pickering, his doctor, and bade him come at once. As he hung up the receiver, Pettigrew, the valet of Paul Mauleverer, the friend who shared the house with him, came hurrying into the hall.

"Come on, Pettigrew," said Rawnsley quickly;

and he led the way out to the Mall. As he went he told Pettigrew that Henry had been murdered.

There was a little pool of blood where Henry had lain. They searched all about it in the hope that the murderer had left something, dropped it in his haste. There was nothing.

Bidding Pettigrew see that no one passed along the pavement under the garden wall, Andrew Rawnsley went back to the house. He found half-a-dozen weeping servants in the dining-room. The housekeeper had straightened the dead boy's limbs and put pennies on his eyes. Andrew Rawnsley bade her go down to Kew at once and break the news to his wife, and turned the other servants out of the room.

Then, with his right elbow on the mantelpiece, his right hand pulling at his beard, he stood staring down at his dead son.

At first his mind was a chaos of horror, anger, pity and dismay. Then out of the chaos rose the memory of Henry as a little boy, bright, merry, intelligent, active, promising; the little boy with whom now and again he had played, the little boy of whom he had had hopes. The memory hurt him; his strong face was set in lines of grief, his eyes were clouded. Then his mind moved to the way in which his business, his crimes, and his pleasures had crowded the child out of his life, and robbed him of the chance of realizing those hopes.

Well, they had gone; it had been a pity, he told himself; but he did not grow sentimental about the matter. He had not been fond of the boy as he grew up, spoiled by his mother; and he did not pretend to himself that he had. But if he had not been deeply wounded in his affections, he had been wounded in them; and his pride was lacerated. That anyone should have dared to do this thing to the son of Andrew Rawnsley! Then his mind turned to thoughts of vengeance.

Who had murdered the boy? He quickly dismissed the thought that it might have been some hooligan footpad out for a purse. His mind turned at once to the band of scoundrels who committed the lucrative crimes by which he profited. He was sure it was the deed of one of them. But which of them was it? And what was the motive? He thought of the quarrel he had had with Montague Burge about Nancy Weston. Was it vengeance? No; that was ridiculous. Burge was not a man to bother about vengeance for a matter like that. He might plot upscrupulously enough to get the girl; he was not the man to take a dangerous revenge for the foiling of his plot. But what could have been the motive of the crime? It could only be money. These scoundrels were not weak men, weak men were feeble in action; and after it they were dangerous with their fears and their consciences. There was not an ounce of sentimentality or imagination

between all the four. Not one of them, Burge, Webling, Shore-Wardell, or even Billson, was the man to commit a crime save for a solid, money reason. And money did not come into this matter. It began to dawn on him that he was face to face with an uncommon mystery. There was no one, no one in the world who had had any motive for murdering his son. It looked as if he had been too quick to dismiss the possibility that the murder had been the work of a hooligan footpad from the Hammersmith slums. Yet surely such an one, after striking down his victim, would never have fled without robbing him—unless the cry had made it too dangerous for him to wait. Yes; it was indeed a mystery—a mystery he must solve himself. The police were no use, unless perhaps the murderer had been a hooligan. He could not set them on the track of his confederates; his tongue was tied. He must himself avenge his own.

While Andrew Rawnsley stood frowning down on the body of his dead son, his mind searching and weighing and sifting, Mr. Shore-Wardell and Marmaduke Billson faced one another in the gas-lit back room of No. 16 Malkin Lane, in a growing fury, upbraiding, abusing, cursing one another for their failure, for having nothing to show for a brutal murder but a shilling novel. Mr. Shore-Wardell abused the pugilist for not having made sure that their victim carried the notes before he struck; the

pugilist abused him for having sent him forth to strike uselessly.

Mr. Shore-Wardell's face was crimson with his vehement rage; his shrill, squeaking voice outrang Billson's husky croak. Billson's scowl deepened and deepened till his face was a mask of ugly ferocity. Then, suddenly, without a word of warning, he smashed his right fist into the round, red expanse of Mr. Shore-Wardell's face, sent him flying back hard against the wall, saw him drop in a heap at its foot, flung out of the room and out of the house.

He strode swiftly up Malkin Lane and turned to the right along the High Road to Hammersmith, his soft hat crushed down over his brow, his shoulders hunched, still swearing under his breath at Mr. Shore-Wardell.

Fifty yards down the High Road he was hustling his way through a group of young men and girls when Inspector Giffen passed him in a taxicab, driving swiftly to the house on the Mall. A minute earlier and he would have passed him in Malkin Lane and marked him.

Mr. Shore-Wardell lay still for a couple of minutes, then he drew himself painfully up into a sitting posture with his back against the wall. He sat there for three or four minutes, trying to understand what had happened, the blood pouring from his nose. Then he pulled out his handkerchief, held it to his

nose, and staggered up to the bathroom. He was a long while stopping the flow of blood, and then his head was aching cruelly. He did not lead a life to enable him to receive a smashing right-hander from a heavy-weight boxer without suffering the greatest possible pain and discomfort from it.

He went into the nearest bedroom and threw himself on the bed. It was two hours before he rose from it, his head still dazed and throbbing. He must be getting out of Malkin Lane. He lighted the gas and looked at himself in the glass. For the first time in his life he really had a nose; at least the button mushroom which had served him for a nose was swollen out of all recognition, swollen and crimson and shiny like the nose of a persistent tippler.

He went downstairs, put on his light, grey overcoat and cap, took his stick, turned out the gas in the back room, went into the dining-room, and peered into the road. A man was walking slowly up the opposite pavement. Mr. Shore-Wardell waited for him to get out of the lane; but half-way up it the man turned and came back to the Mall. There he turned, walked half-way up the Lane again, turned, and again came back.

Mr. Shore-Wardell's heart sank. The man was watching the lane. For ten minutes he stood at the window, watching the watcher, pulling at his beard, cudgelling his brains for a plan. He was feeling

his swollen nose painfully, when it gave him the plan.

He waited till the watcher had gone up the lane nearly to the end of the beat he was walking, then he came noisily out of the front door, laughing, cried into the house, "Good-ni', old man! Good-ni'! Shunday! My place—Shunday! Shupper at eight! Good-ni'!" And slammed the door.

He lurched down the path to the gate, and saw the watcher hurrying down the other side of the road to get a look at him. He went down to the Mall, lurching from side to side, now and again he gurgled and chuckled. As he turned along the Mall he broke into a snatch of song and waved his cane cheerfully. He lurched along to the end of the Mall, putting the strongest constraint on himself not to look back. At the end of the Mall he dropped his cane; and in stooping down with a drunken man's care and deliberation, to pick it up, he got the look back he wanted. The Mall was empty; the watcher had gone back into Malkin Lane.

At Hammersmith Bridge Mr. Shore-Wardell took a taxicab to the corner of Sutherland Avenue. He arrived there, wearing a beard, and walked down it. He came out of the further end beardless, and took another cab to the top of St. James's Street.

Andrew Rawnsley was still cudgelling his brains for the motive of the crime, when there came the sound of men's voices in the hall; and Detective-

Inspector Giffen, a short, thickset, snub-nosed sharp-featured man, of a brisk air and with bright, fierce eyes, came into the dining-room, followed by a local detective. He had been up in Hammersmith when the telephone message had come to the police station from the house on the Mall; and the police inspector in charge had at once sent out to the "Earl Howe," where he was interviewing two of the leading criminals of the district with a view to obtaining information about the doings of a third, and asked him to take this new affair in hand.

"I'm Detective-Inspector Giffen from Scotland Yard," he said, briskly, by way of introduction, and at once plunged into the case.

Andrew Rawnsley told him the facts quickly and succinctly. His son had been dining with him, and after dinner he had gone round to his other house in Malkin Lane to get a book. Ten minutes later he had heard a cry from the Mall, and had hurried out to find his son lying dead under the wall of his garden, and the Mall empty.

Inspector Giffen asked how long he had been getting out to the Mall after the cry. Andrew Rawnsley said, "Less than half a minute," and Annie said she was sure it was not more.

"And you didn't see anyone?" said Inspector Giffen.

"Not a soul, neither to the right nor to the left; and there was no one in Malkin Lane."

"Of course he'd bolt quickly, whoever it was," said Inspector Giffen. "But it would take him some seconds to rob the body."

"But nothing has been taken—no valuables," said Andrew Rawnsley, pointing to the watch and chain and money which his housekeeper had laid together on the table at Henry's feet.

Inspector Giffen scratched his head, "And where's the book?" he said.

"By Jove! I never thought of the book!" cried Andrew Rawnsley.

"We'd better go round to your house in Malkin Lane and see if he took it away," said Inspector Giffen.

They went round to 11 Malkin Lane, and not only found that the copy of "Lord Lisdor" was not on the table where Andrew Rawnsley had left it, but they found the other traces of the unfortunate boy's visit, the clock with its face turned to the wall, the card changed in the calendar.

When they came back to the Mall, Inspector Giffen crossed to the river parapet and with his eye measured the distance either way along the wall, and up Malkin Lane.

"The murderer would hardly have had time to get out of your sight," he said; and he turned to the local detective and added: "It's worth while keeping an eye on this lane. Jenkinson, you'd better watch it for the next twenty-four hours."

It's quite likely that our man is in one of the houses."

Then he went back into the house with Andrew Rawnsley.

They found that Dr. Pickering had come and was examining Henry's body. He told them that he had died of a compound fracture of the skull inflicted by a blunt instrument.

As the detective questioned him, Andrew Rawnsley, who was standing by the fire, again set his right elbow on the mantelpiece; and his right hand played with his beard. At a moment when his hand covered the lower part of his face, throwing into relief his nose and eyes and brows and forehead, the detective chanced to look up at him. Inspector Giffen started and gasped; his eyes opened wide in an unbelieving stare; his mouth opened. Once more he saw the upper part of the face of the sixth Marquess of Drysdale, as he had seen it when Dr. McGinnis was drawing down the shroud to show him the wound in the suicide's throat; *he saw it feature for feature as he had seen it ten years ago.*

CHAPTER XI

ANDREW RAWNSLEY KEEPS WATCH, AND INSPECTOR
GIFFEN MAKES INQUIRIES

INSPECTOR GIFFEN and Dr. Pickering had gone. Henry's body had been carried up to a bedroom. The servants had gone to bed. The house was still. Andrew Rawnsley sat in his library, puzzling over the problem, cudgelling his brains for its solution. At last an idea came to him. He came out of his study, went into the back hall and along a passage on the left to a little staircase leading down to the basement. It was not the main staircase to the kitchens, but a side staircase in the left wing of the house. At the bottom of it he found himself among the cellars under the left wing. He walked along a narrow passage in utter darkness. In spite of the darkness, he went along it with a sureness and quickness which showed that he often used it. He passed several doors of cellars leading into it, some of them open, others shut; and at the end of the passage he unlocked the door which faced down it, passed through it, locked it behind him, and switched on the electric light.

He was in a small circular cellar, some twelve feet across, at the end of the left wing of the house. Facing the door was a window, half above, half below the level of the cement floor. A square opening had been made in the floor, nearly three feet deep, down to the bottom of the window to let in more light. A thick blind covered the window. He crossed the cellar and pressed his thumb against the wall beside the window. A small sliding panel slipped aside and revealed two switches. He pressed down the bottom switch; and the cement floor of the cellar moved round. It carried him half-way round the wall till he was at right angles to the window and the door. The square opening in the floor had stopped at the top of a flight of steps which led down into the earth.

He went down the steps; at the bottom of them was a small square chamber. Four passages ran from it, one back under the house, one to the left, the third to the right, and the fourth straight forward. From one of the shelves in the walls of the chamber he took an electric hand-lamp and a magazine pistol. He switched on the lamp and took the passage to the right. It was narrow, not more than two feet broad, and low; he had to move along it stooping.

It ran for two hundred feet, and ended in a flight of steps ten feet high, widening fan-like as they rose to a width of seven feet. Above the top

step rose a seven foot square of brick wall. He pressed a spring on the left of it; there was a creaking of machinery; and the square of wall revolved on a central pivot, as do doors of large shops or restaurants. He passed through it; it completed its revolution and closed with a click behind him. He was in another cellar; and the wall through which he had come showed only a flat expanse of unplastered bricks.

He unlocked the door of this other cellar, went along a passage to a flight of kitchen stairs, went up them into a hall, opened a door on the left, and came into the dining-room of 11 Malkin Lane. He sat down in the bow window of it, and looked through the curtain. He could see Jenkinson strolling backwards and forwards on his beat; save for him the lane was empty, and nearly all the windows, upstairs and down, on the other side of the road were dark. He crouched forward, watching.

He had been watching for an hour and a half when Mr. Shore-Wardell made his dramatic exit from No. 16. Andrew Rawnsley recognized his figure at a glance; he knew that a grey beard had been part of the disguise he had worn in the affair of the Aldington Emeralds; the big, bibulous nose must be false. The view he got of Mr. Shore-Wardell's back as he went down to the bottom of the lane rendered him absolutely certain that he had

made no mistake. He smiled grimly at his confederate's excellent imitation of a drunken man, and muttered under his breath: "Certainly Mauleverer's men are men of resource." Then he saw Jenkinson go down to the bottom of the lane, look down the Mall after Mr. Shore-Wardell, and come back to his beat. He thought to himself that that was just as well; he could avenge himself without the help of the police.

He did not stir; he sat on, pondering his discovery. The more he considered it, the more surprised he grew that it should have been Mr. Shore-Wardell who had come out of the house opposite. He was not the man to commit a murder by violence. . . . Poison—yes. . . . As often as you liked. . . . But violence? Never.

He had still much to find out; he was as far as ever from seeing any possible motive for the crime. Then he wondered if there were anyone still in No. 16. Why should he not find out? He rose at the thought, for with him to think was to act. He went back to the house on the Mall by the way he had come, opening the door in the cellar wall, by a hidden spring on this side of it, and moving the revolving floor of the other cellar by a spring in the little chamber at the bottom of the steps.

He did not put back the electric lamp or the magazine pistol on their shelf. The lamp was in the breast pocket of his coat, the pistol in the hip pocket

of his trousers. He went out of the circular cellar and along two or three passages till he came to the kitchen. He loaded a tray with food from the larder, carried it up to the dining-room, and set it on the table. Then he came out of the front door and walked round into Malkin Lane.

Jenkinson came down it to him; and Andrew Rawnsley said: "You must be tired of walking up and down here—tired and hungry. Go to the dining-room, and you'll find some supper on the table. I'll keep watch here for half an hour. If anyone comes out of any of the houses, I can easily call you."

"I could peck a bit," said Jenkinson, hesitating.

"Go on in, man," said Andrew Rawnsley in a tone which did not invite disobedience.

Jenkinson went.

Andrew Rawnsley waited two or three minutes; then he crossed the road to No. 16. He stood in front of it, regarding its dark windows for perhaps two minutes, wondering whether frightened eyes were peering out at him from behind any curtain. Then he went up the steps to the front door, set his ear against it, and listened. There was no sound of anyone stirring inside the house. He drew from his pocket the electric lamp, and turned its light on to the lock. It looked an ordinary enough lock—the lock that closes a hundred thousand front doors in London. He took from his trouser pocket a knife

and opened an oddly shaped blade. He slipped it in between the door and the door-post and pressed back the catch. The door opened.

He closed the blade of the knife, took the lamp in his left hand, the pistol in his right, and quietly stepped into the hall. As he stepped in, he switched on the lamp again. The hall was empty.

He moved across it very quietly in his pumps, and very gently opened the door of the dining-room. The strongest scent of stale tobacco struck on his nostrils; and on the instant the position of the two chairs in the bow window, the two glasses on the table between them caught his eye. He crossed the room to them. About either chair the fallen tobacco ash from two or three dozen cigars lay thick; and brown lay the stinking butts of the cigars from which they had fallen.

Here had sat two watchers—yes, two. But for whom had they watched, and with what purpose? One of the watchers had gone. Where was the other?

He stole softly into the back room and turned the ray from his lamp about it. It fell on something red on the blue carpet; it was the missing book. He examined the rest of the room very carefully, bending down to scan the carpet, and found the little pool of blood from Mr. Shore-Wardell's nose. He thought that it looked as if Mr. Shore-Wardell had stabbed his confederate. What had he done with the body?

He moved about the house with greater carelessness. Evidently the other man who had watched would not be in a condition to give him trouble. He looked for him in all the rooms downstairs; then he went upstairs and examined the bedrooms. There was blood in the bathroom and bloodstains on the white counterpane of the bed on which Mr. Shore-Wardell had lain to recover from Billson's blow. Andrew Rawnsley was more puzzled than ever. Why should Mr. Shore-Wardell have carried his confederate upstairs after stabbing him and laid him on the bed. The theory that Mr. Shore-Wardell had done the stabbing was plainly wrong. Had the confederate stabbed Mr. Shore-Wardell, left him for dead, and bolted before Giffen had set the watch in the lane? That looked more probable. Then Shore-Wardell had slowly recovered, stopped the bleeding, and made his escape. In that case all his lurching had not been put on; he had been faint from loss of blood. It might be so; but it was all very obscure. However he had taken the first steps to secure his vengeance; he knew he had to be avenged on two people. . . . Shore-Wardell was one. . . . He would lead him to the other.

As he came out of the empty house, he said, softly, "Here Mauleverer takes up the inquiry."

Inspector Giffen did not take steps till the next day. He left the house on the Mall in the state which he was wont to describe as "flabbergasted."

The Drysdale murder had been his first important case. Ten years before the Marchioness of Drysdale had been found dead in the home wood of Drysdale Court, with two revolver bullets in her heart. He had been sent down from Scotland Yard to investigate the matter. How he had worked on it! The sleepless nights it had cost him! Then he had got his clue; and as he unraveled it and unraveled it he had slowly gathered up proof after proof until the damning case against the Marquess was complete.

Then, on the night on which he got the last piece of evidence, and had made up his mind to apply the very next day for a warrant, his prey, so patiently hunted down, had escaped him. The Marquess had committed suicide that very night.

Well did he remember his fury of disappointment at the news, and well did he remember his feelings as he walked up the great Italian staircase, with Dr. McGinnis, the family doctor of the Drysdales, to see the body of the suicide. He remembered well the room with its blue furniture and curtains, the big old-fashioned four-post bed, with its blue hangings, in the middle of the room, and in the middle of the bed the still, straight figure under the sheet. But the best of all he remembered the white face of the Marquess as the doctor drew down the sheet to show him the wound in the throat. And now—ten years later—he had seen that dead face on the

shoulders of a living man in the House on the Mall!

He went over the whole gruesome business again and again. No one with such a wound could be alive. It was beyond the bounds of possibility. Yet he had that very night seen the man alive. He went over the whole affair again and again as he tossed beside his sleeping wife in their little West Kensington home. There was the funeral; he remembered reading in the papers accounts of the funeral of the dead Marquess. The papers had said that he had committed suicide out of grief at his wife's death. He knew better than that; but he had never known why the sixth Marquess of Drysdale had murdered his wife; he had never been able even to make a good guess at the motive of the murder. Taking it along with the suicide, he had made up his mind that it had been the deed of a madman, though there had been no madness in the way the Marquess had followed his gathering together the damning evidence against him. Whom had they buried—what had they buried in the Drysdale family vault in Drysdale church?

How had the Marquess recovered from such a wound? No wonder Andrew Rawnsley wore a beard to hide that scar!

It was five o'clock before Inspector Giffen fell asleep; but he came to breakfast little the worse for his bad night. He was hardened against most privations; he had to be. He had just sat down when

he saw an ugly-looking gash on the back of his little boy's hand.

"How did you cut yourself like that, Jimmy?" he said.

Jimmy laughed heartily and shrilly. "It isn't a cut, Daddy," he said. "It's Aspinall's enamel."

Inspector Giffen banged his hand down on the table with a violence that made every cup dance in its saucer.

"That's how they did me!" he cried. "The wound was painted!"

"What wound?" said Mrs. Giffen.

He did not answer; and she did not press the question. He was black with rage.

He made a good breakfast, because it was his custom; but his heart was not in it. His heart, mind, and spirit were in his discovery of the night before; he could only think of how he had been tricked ten years ago.

He was in too great haste to get to the theatre of inquiry to take the District Railway; directly after breakfast he dashed off to Chiswick in a taxicab. His brain grew clear enough when he started making his inquiries; and he found no lack of information. Everyone who knew Chiswick or Hammersmith, knew the proprietor of Rawnsley's Emporium; his had been the most successful career in the district; he was one of the district's leading men. There was no end to the information about him; he

had been associated with all the important social, municipal and charitable undertakings in the district during all its growth. Indeed there was more information than Inspector Giffen had expected or wanted. Andrew Rawnsley had married Mrs. Rawnsley and founded the Chiswick Emporium two and twenty years ago.

At first it looked as if Inspector Giffen had walked into a blind alley. Then, pondering the matter at home that evening, he began to see the motive which had led the sixth Marquess of Drysdale to murder his wife.

CHAPTER XII

ANDREW RAWNSLEY IS FIRM

HAVING once induced Mr. Wilson to risk the disturbing effects on his work of a dinner at the Ritz and a theatre, the Marquess found but little difficulty in making this dissipation a weekly custom. For such an exceeding solemn young man he could make a dinner very amusing indeed. There was in Mr. Wilson a vein of gentle, rather dry humor which stimulated him and rendered his entertaining task easier. But, when, as sometimes happened, Mr. Wilson lapsed for two or three courses into a trance, in which, doubtless, his mind wrestled with complicated problems of machinery, the Marquess did not seem to miss at all the stimulation of that humor. He had no difficulty in keeping Nancy smiling. Perhaps the desire to see those delightful smiles wreath her lips was alone stimulation enough.

Nancy was not a brilliant girl; she never discomfited him by a sudden sparkling, but irrelevant, sally in the womanly vein. But she had a quick intelligence; and she surprised him often by the swiftness

with which she saw a joke. Sometimes he would hide a joke in a mass of heavy verbiage, keeping his most solemn face the while, to see how long she would be discovering it. She was never long. He felt that this was all to the good; it was really quite unnecessary that so beautiful a creature should be intelligent at all.

He could not always keep off politics; indeed it could not be expected that he should; politics were his subject. But since he regarded them, in the proper oligarchic spirit, as a game, he contrived to make even politics interesting, and sometimes amusing.

Since they interested him, they began to interest Nancy. She would not only listen to him earnestly, her brow prettily puckered, when he talked about them, but also she would sometimes read about them in the *Morning Post*, the paper which her uncle so regularly received and so rarely read. Sometimes she found a speech of the Marquess in it, and read it.

She was puzzled (it seemed to be the function of the Marquess to puzzle her) by the fact that the writers in the *Morning Post* wrote about politics in such a very different fashion from that in which the Marquess talked about them. She was even more puzzled by the difficulty she found in reconciling his speeches with his talk.

One afternoon they were sitting in Mr. Rawns-

ley's garden after tea, for on his way to Chiswick the Marquess had passed its owner motoring eastward; and Nancy said:

"I read your speech about the situation in the paper this morning."

"Did you?" said the Marquess, in a pleased tone. "Did you like it?"

"It was very clever, of course," said Nancy cautiously. "But what you said in your speech was very different from what you said on Thursday evening."

"How was it different?"

"On Thursday you laughed, at least you made us laugh at the whole thing. But last night you were ever so serious about it."

"Of course, I was. I am as solemn as a judge in the House. I always am. I practice it," said the Marquess.

"Do you mean you were humbugging?" said Nancy.

"Humbugging! Humbugging the House of Lords? Oh, Miss Weston—Miss Weston! What a terrible thing to suggest!" cried the Marquess in a tone of horror. "Do you realize that possibly the collateral ancestors of several of them may have come over with William the Conqueror?"

"What has that got to do with it?" said Nancy.

"Everything—everything," said the Marquess quickly. "England expects its politics serious. We

must see that it gets them serious. So I practice solemnity—practice it. I am solemn for my country's good."

"Yes; you did humbug them," said Nancy, sternly. "And now you're trying to humbug me."

"Never! I wouldn't dream of such a thing!" protested the Marquess vehemently. Then he laughed his sudden, joyous laugh.

Nancy frowned; then she laughed too.

"You're getting to know too much about politics. I have been indiscreet. I am a babbler," said the Marquess, very solemn again.

"Well, I shan't tell anyone," said Nancy, carelessly.

"I believe you wouldn't," said the Marquess. "You are plainly the soul of discretion."

"Well, it wouldn't do, would it?" said Nancy.

"It wouldn't do much harm; it would fall on deaf ears. Our countrymen are impervious to the truth. All they want is solemnity."

"Well, they get that from you, anyhow," said Nancy.

"They do; and sometimes I have a terrible fear," said the Marquess, and he paused.

"What of?" said Nancy.

"Sometimes, when I lie awake at night and think—that is when I do my thinking—I grow afraid of its working in."

"Your solemnity?" said Nancy.

"Yes, my solemnity. It would be dreadful if it worked in."

Nancy looked at him thoughtfully, with puckered brow. "I don't think you need be afraid of that," she said. "I'm beginning to see that there's no room for it."

"Oh come; not room for solemnity under the surface of an Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs?" said the Marquis.

"Not in you," said Nancy definitely.

"I say, Drysdale; can you spare me a minute?" said a voice.

They looked round and saw Andrew Rawnsley standing on the steps leading down to the garden.

The Marquess looked at him unamiably and frowned. "If you'll excuse me for a few minutes," he said to Nancy. "You see it's his garden I'm walking about in; I can't very well tell him to go to Jericho in his own garden."

He went with Mr. Rawnsley into the library; and Mr. Rawnsley said, in a somewhat threatening tone, "I told you that you'd better let Miss Weston alone."

"I *am* letting her alone," said the Marquess firmly.

"You're always dangling about her," said Mr. Rawnsley.

"Well you can't expect me to live in a state of absolute friendlessness just to gratify your morbid

sense of propriety," said the Marquess. "Miss Weston and I are just on friendly terms. I was particularly careful to make it quite clear to her that we *could* only be on friendly terms. I explained to her what I intended to do in the matter of matrimony. So do not say that I am turning her head, or that I am filling it with nonsense, or that I am awakening false hopes in her, or that I am—can you think of any other phrase?"

"No, I can't," said Andrew Rawnsley.

"Then don't say it, or even think it," said the Marquess. "There is no reason for it. We are just friends; and we're going to stay friends—at any rate she is, apparently."

"Don't you find it a trifle difficult in the case of such a pretty girl as Miss Weston?" said Andrew Rawnsley.

"Occasionally, I admit, I do find a little difficulty," said the Marquess lightly; and then he added solemnly: "But I am not of a susceptible nature, thank God. I am strong where women are concerned—not like you. Which reminds me; where do you come in? You *are* of a susceptible nature—very. I've been wondering—a good deal." And he looked at Andrew Rawnsley with very keen, searching eyes.

"I don't come in at all," said Andrew Rawnsley. "Nancy is related to me rather closely."

"I thought that was probably it, when I learned

that you hadn't made love to her," said the Marquess. "How close is the relationship?"

"I never discuss genealogy, or, for that matter, gratify unauthorized curiosity," said Andrew Rawnsley, in a mocking tone. "If you came to me with an honorable demand for the young lady's hand, it's always possible that I might tell you. But since you only desire her friendship, there is no reason why I should."

"I didn't say I only desired her friendship," said the Marquess. "I said that that was where we had got to."

Andrew Rawnsley looked at him thoughtfully; then he said: "That was what I thought. You're conducting a courtship on the fantastic lines which would appeal to you. How you get on in politics as you do beats me. But all the same, you're going to give me your word of honor that it's on the square. If you don't, it's going to stop."

"Oh, I give you that," said the Marquess.

"Well, it's enough from you. But you're one of the very few men in the world I'd take it from, where a woman is concerned," said Andrew Rawnsley.

"Oh, yes," said the Marquess. "Who is Wilson—her uncle?"

"He is her uncle," said Andrew Rawnsley.

"Yes, but he's a gentleman. How is it that he grubs away in your power-house inventing things."

"It's his fancy," said Andrew Rawnsley. "He's a man of quite good blood, Wilson. But it's his fancy to invent things. There's not any need for him to do it now. He's done very well out of some of his inventions. You see I'm his partner; and I've run the business side of them for years. Nancy will have quite a comfortable dowry when she marries."

"Then why on earth does she go to that beastly Emporium of yours and do typewriting?" said the Marquess.

"Her uncle and I decided that it was the only sensible thing for a pretty girl like that to do. It keeps her out of mischief. If she were knocking about in society she'd be falling in love with the wrong man very probably. Besides, I want her to get some little knowledge of business; I have an idea of marrying her to a very decent young millionaire, a quite square young fellow.

"The devil you have!" said the Marquess in a tone of considerable interest.

"Yes, that's why I want to make sure that you kept on merely friendly terms with her and didn't trifle with her affections," said Andrew Rawnsley, smiling.

CHAPTER XIII

PAUL MAULEVERER TAKES UP THE INQUIRY

PAUL MAULEVERER sprang out of his motor car with a lightness which did credit to his fifty years, and entered the central door of the block of flats in Holland Park Avenue in which Colonel Webling lived. With his handsome, clear-skinned, high-colored face, his strong nose, firm lips, and fine brown eyes, his tall, broad, well-set-up figure, he did not look a day more than forty; and had there been less light, and that behind him, he might have looked thirty-five.

He ran lightly up the stairs to Colonel Webling's flat on the third floor and pressed the electric bell. There was a delay in opening the door, though he could hear someone walking about the flat. Then it opened; and an old woman, very brown, very wrinkled, garishly dressed, and of the most foreign-looking air, peered out suspiciously. When she saw who stood on the threshold, the suspicion on her face grew deeper and more hostile.

"Master out," she said sullenly, in a cracked voice, in French.

"Ah, he's not back yet, isn't he? I'll come in and wait. He's expecting me," said Paul Mauleverer, carelessly; and on the words, he brushed lightly past the old woman, crossed the little hall, opened the door opposite, and went in.

Colonel Webling had plainly retained the tastes of his exile. The room was furnished in Oriental fashion, with mats and divans; the walls were hung with embroidered silks. On one of the divans was stretched a woman, fair, golden-haired, almond-eyed, with features so perfect as to render her face almost insipid. Between her lips was the amber mouthpiece of the long tube which ran to a bubbling narghileh on the floor, from the bowl of which the smoke rose in slow spirals.

Her half-closed eyes opened wide at the sight of Paul Mauleverer. A slow, languorous smile wreathed her full, voluptuous lips, and she said in a low, delightful voice, in French: "Ah, it is M. Paul."

"Yes, M. Paul just coming to life in the light of your eyes, Madame Zoraïde," said Mauleverer, smiling back at her.

He crossed the room to her, raised her hand, kissed it, sat down on the divan nearest to her, and gazed at her beautiful face with the smiling content of a lover of beauty before a beautiful thing.

The old woman still with her suspicious, hostile air, entered the room, bringing another narghileh.

She set it on the floor beside Mauleverer, with a sulky, reluctant air, filled the bowl with coarse-cut tobacco, took a disk of charcoal from a blue earthenware jar, held it in the wood fire with a pair of long, fine silver tongs till it was glowing, and then laid it in the bowl of the pipe. Mauleverer drew in two or three deep breaths; and the tobacco kindled. The old woman went to the door, stood for a moment looking at them with suspicious, hostile eyes, and went out.

"The guardian of the treasure is very suspicious to-day," said Paul Mauleverer, smiling. "But when one guards such a treasure as Madame Zoraïde, it is undoubtedly the right attitude."

Mrs. Webling, to give Zoraïde the title conferred on her by the English Law and the English Church, smiled her slow, languorous smile again, and said, "Fatimah is a very foolish old woman."

"Very foolish," said Paul Mauleverer. "The most precious treasures can only guard themselves."

Mrs. Webling smiled at him. He looked at her for a minute or two with an air of complete appreciation, then he went on to talk to her of the amusements she had enjoyed lately, of the motor drives she had taken, the plays she had seen, the restaurants she had dined or supped at. Since she had last seen him she had been out nearly every night; but she complained that she was lonely, that life was dull, that she had no friends to talk to. Maulev-

erer objected that she was talking to one now. She said that she only saw him once or twice a week; besides, it was not men she wanted to talk to, but women. In the harem there had always been so many to talk to, there had been talking all day long. Here there were no women; and the days passed very, very slowly.

He asked her if she was sorry that she had let Colonel Webling carry her off; and she answered that she had not expected this dull life; besides, in this country there was no sun, no sun that gave any sunshine. As she talked, his eyes rested always on her face, and all the while they were bright with the warm glow of the lover of beauty. He murmured that it was a pity that she who was the sun for all who saw her, could not shine upon herself. She smiled at his exaggerated compliments like the vain child she was.

Fatimah entered again, bringing coffee in little cups half full, Turkish fashion, of coarse grounds. She handed their cups to them with the same sullen reluctance.

When she had gone Mauleverer's eyes suddenly grew very keen; but he said carelessly enough: "Did you go to the theatre last night, Madame?"

"No; I was all alone," she said.

"I wish I had known," said Mauleverer. "I would have come and tried to amuse you—if always Fatimah had let me in; but I was expecting your

husband to come to see me, and I waited at home for him. I suppose he was amusing himself somewhere else. Was he very late home?"

He put the question carelessly enough, but his eyes were very keen on her face.

"Yes, he was very late," said Mrs. Webling. "It was past midnight when he came home."

"Much past?" said Mauleverer, quietly.

"No; the clock had just struck twelve."

"And he didn't go out again?" said Mauleverer.

"At that hour? No, he went to bed."

"Wise man," said Mauleverer.

The keen, watchful look faded from his eyes; they filled again with the warm glow of admiration. He seemed to relax and settle more deeply among the cushions. He talked on idly for a few minutes, feeding the Circassian's childish vanity with his compliments. Then they heard the outer door of the flat shut, and Colonel Webling came into the room.

He flashed a sharp glance at Mauleverer and another at his wife, and said, in French: "Hullo, Mauleverer! How are you? Has Madame been entertaining you all right?"

"How are you, Webling?" said Mauleverer, rising and shaking hands with him. "Mrs. Webling has been entertaining me delightfully—as always. I was hoping that you would have looked me up last night. You often come in on a Thursday. But

as you didn't come I came round to-day to pay my respects to Mrs. Webling and talk over a little matter of business with you."

"I was coming round last night; but I got in a poker game at the club. Come along to my room; business will bore my wife," said Colonel Webling, quickly.

Mauleverer rose and picked up his narghileh. Colonel Webling led the way into a smaller room on the left-hand side of the hall, a room furnished in the same Oriental fashion as that they had just left. They stretched themselves on divans; and Fatimah brought in a narghileh for her master and lighted it.

Then Colonel Webling said: "This is an extraordinary affair, this murder of young Rawnsley just outside your house in the Mall. I have just been reading about it in the evening papers."

"So far it's entirely inexplicable," said Mauleverer. "Rawnsley—of course it's the Rawnsley with whom I share the house—cannot conceive of any possible motive for the crime. It wasn't robbery—at least nothing was stolen from the boy. It wasn't a woman—the boy was quite of the harmless and ineffectual type. As far as we know he hadn't an enemy in the world; and if he had had, it wouldn't have been the kind of enemy who goes in for murder. You don't find that kind in Kew."

"His father's the Rawnsley of Rawnsley's Em-

porium, isn't he? *He* might have had an enemy—somebody taking revenge on him this way," said Colonel Webling.

"No, his father has never had any difficulty with his employees; and though there have been some scandals about him, he has always treated the women quite decently and provided for them or married them off to somebody. The murder is really inexplicable," said Mauleverer.

Colonel Webling frowned thoughtfully; then he said slowly, hesitating: "I'm not so sure about that. I fancy I could give you an explanation—of sorts."

"The deuce you could!" cried Mauleverer.

"Yes. When Burge was handing over our share of the money for Lady Aldington's jewels, that greedy brute, Shore-Wardell, started grumbling that you were getting too big a share of it, considering that you ran no risks. Then he began to ask how it was paid you. Burge told him a cock and bull story about your getting it in two hundred fivers, for which you sent a messenger round to him at the house in Malkin Lane. Well, I think that Shore-Wardell was hanging about watching the Malkin Lane house; and when he saw young Rawnsley go into it, he jumped to the conclusion that he was the messenger come for the notes, waited for him, and knocked him on the head."

Mauleverer's eyes were shining with a fierce

brightness. "By Jove!" he cried. "That explains the book!"

"What book?" said Colonel Webling.

"The book young Rawnsley went to fetch from the house in Malkin Lane. It wasn't on his body or lying near his body. It couldn't be found. In the bad light Shore-Wardell must have thought that that book was the packet of notes."

"You've got it," said Colonel Webling. "You don't miss much."

Mauleverer lay back with a frown that was almost a scowl on his thoughtful face. Presently he said slowly, dropping his words one by one: "Well, I shall be sorry for Shore-Wardell when I tell Andrew Rawnsley about this. And I tell you what it is, Webling, we can't have this kind of thing—we can't have it. It's treachery. It must be stopped."

"You're right," said Colonel Webling.

"And it's odd how these things come together. Burge has been getting insubordinate and threatening treachery. Burge and Shore-Wardell have got to go. What will you deal with them for?"

"Three hundred apiece, but you'll have to help me fix it up," said Colonel Webling.

"Yes; I'll make the plans and you'll execute them, that'll be all right," said Mauleverer. "But I don't want them dealt with immediately. I want them for this job with the young American—Drayton."

After that they can go and commit suicide together if they like."

"Suicide?" said Colonel Webling, with a somewhat puzzled air. "Why should they commit suicide? Tough brutes like them never commit suicide."

"I have a fancy that that's what they will do, odd as it sounds," said Mauleverer, with a very curious smile. "But about this young Drayton: 'I've worked the thing out and what I want is that he should be brought to the house in Malkin Lane insensible and with his leg broken. I don't want a compound fracture; I just want the tibia neatly snapped. Also I don't want his skull cracking; he'll have to be sand-bagged; and that you'll have to use Billson for. Drayton isn't going to disappear for much longer than a month; and it won't do for you to be concerned in his disappearance.'"

"I see. There oughtn't to be much difficulty about that, though of course it is easier to knock a man on the head outright and be done with it," said Colonel Webling.

Mauleverer rose, saying: "I think I'll just drop in casually on Shore-Wardell and see if he shows any signs of his last night's exploit."

He bade Colonel and Mrs. Webling good-bye, bade his chauffeur drive him to Mr. Shore-Wardell's rooms in Jermyn Street, and stepped into his car.

Mr. Shore-Wardell was spending the day at home.

Indeed his swollen nose rendered it impossible for a man of his nice tastes to appear before his friends. He had had a very bad night. The pain of his nose and the nervous shock from the blow had broken his slumbers. The doctor whom his valet had summoned early in the morning had been able to do but little to abate the pain. He had not been out of bed long, though it was half-past four when Mauleverer called; and there was not a visitor in the world he would not sooner have received.

He was in two minds about receiving him at all, for he knew himself to be at no time a match for Mauleverer; and in his shaky condition he would be less of a match than ever. But, on the whole, he thought it better in this dangerous conjuncture to see him. There was no reason in the world why anyone should connect him with the murder on the Mall; and if any faint suspicion of him had arisen in Mauleverer's mind, he thought that he could dispose of it by judicious lying.

On entering the room Mauleverer perceived very clearly that Mr. Shore-Wardell had had no reason whatever to disguise himself by wearing a false nose the night before. It was doubtful indeed whether any false nose could have disguised him so completely as did this grotesque real one. Since it was not the kind of nose anyone expects to see on a man about town, it was quite natural that Mauleverer should in-

quire with the most sympathetic interest how he had come by it.

It had come by going to Wonderland, Wonderland in the East End, said Mr. Shore-Wardell. He had gone there with a friend to see the punching; there had been a row about a fight; and then the audience had fought amongst itself with the greatest possible freedom. In the course of that fight a perfect stranger had hit him on the nose, and this was the result.

Now Mauleverer took an interest in the great national sport of boxing, and he knew well that there had been no boxing at Wonderland the night before, since it was not a Saturday night. That knowledge did not prevent him from condoling with his injured friend, in spite of his contempt for a man who could only invent an incredible story about a swollen nose.

As he condoled he pondered that nose earnestly. He knew that Mr. Shore-Wardell had left Malkin Lane with that grotesque lump in the middle of his face between one and two in the morning. Had he come there with it or had he acquired it there. He was quite sure that Henry Rawnsley had not given it him. He could not have hit hard enough. And then it flashed on Mauleverer, who had hit it hard enough. As Billson had given Mr. Shore-Wardell the idea of explaining it by a visit to Wonderland, so the mention of Wonderland suggested

Billson to Mauleverer. On the instant he saw what had happened. The precious pair had quarreled about the failure of their crime; and in the course of the quarrel Billson had hit out. Mr. Shore-Wardell's nose was the fount from which had flowed the blood in the back room, the bathroom, and on the bed in No. 16 Malkin Lane.

There came an ugly glitter into Mauleverer's eyes; and he said: "Talking about Wonderland, can you by any chance tell me the new address of that man Billson? He moved last week and I've lost it."

Mr. Shore-Wardell's shakiness told; he hesitated.

Then he said: "Billson's address, how on earth should I know what his address is? You've always arranged for us to meet somewhere."

"Of course—of course," said Mauleverer. "But there was the chance that you might have learned it the night you traveled down to Chipperfield and back with him."

But Mr. Shore-Wardell's hesitation had given him the certainty he wanted. Billson had been the other watcher in 16 Malkin Lane.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

AT half-past seven on the twenty-ninth of May, Rupert Christopher Drayton came into the Savoy Restaurant. He had arrived at the hotel that afternoon, and had established himself in it in rooms overlooking the Thames; and he came to dinner at this early and unfashionable hour because he was going to a theatre afterwards.

He came into the restaurant in a very pleasant mood, full of the agreeable expectation of spending six enjoyable weeks in London and Paris. The information which Montague Burge had given his confederates, that Rupert Drayton had come to England without the introductions he could have brought with him, in order to see that country for himself, in a radical spirit, was quite wrong. He had not brought those introductions because he wanted to enjoy it in his own way, in complete freedom, unhampered by social engagements to people who would probably bore him. He was a stern and strenuous young fellow, working earnestly at the management of one of his father's large stores, that in Chicago; and the social whirl was distasteful to him. He loved to work like a horse and play like one.

He came to his table; the waiter had drawn back his chair; and he was just about to sit down in it, when he caught sight of the face of a girl at a table twenty feet away, and stood quite still, gazing at it in overwhelming admiration. He had gazed at it for more than a minute; then, probably because his intent eyes drew hers, the girl turned her head and looked at him. He gazed at her steadily, with honest and frank admiration, forgetting everything but the vision of beauty; she turned her head quickly, frowned faintly, and went on talking to the man she was dining with.

Rupert Drayton remembered his manners, flushed, dragged his eyes off her, sat down, and took up the menu.

The words on it danced before his eyes in an almost perfect indistinctness. By an effort he gained control of his eyesight, saw the card clearly, and said to the attentive waiter, "Ice pudding."

"Yes, sir; ice pudding—ice pudding first, sir?" said the waiter in a tone of pain.

"No, no; soup—Bortsch," said Rupert, impatiently.

"You wouldn't like a little caviare first—to begin with, sir?" said the waiter.

"Yes, caviare," said Rupert, impatiently.

The waiter went; and Rupert began again, with more discretion, to let his eyes have their fill of beauty. He had never in his life seen a girl, or for

that matter anything else, so beautiful. He had never dreamed, not that he was given to dreaming of them, that a woman could be so beautiful. She did not look at him again. Indeed, Nancy, for it was Nancy, in the course of dining and going to the theatre with the Marquess and her uncle, had grown used to the gaze of frank admiration, and she took very little interest in it.

She was dining alone with the Marquess, for her uncle had found his mind involved in a piece of machinery of such extraordinary complication that he had been unable to tear it away from it. He was afraid, indeed, that did he break the thread of imagination, he might find it impossible to join it again.

Rupert ate his caviare, but for all he tasted of its flavor it might have been sawdust. Several times also in putting it into his mouth, he missed. Twice he tried to put it into the middle of his cheek; once he tried to put it into the cleft in his square, strong chin—with equal ill success. The Bortsch might have been a draught from the purest and most limpid stream for all he tasted of it.

The intelligent waiter, perceiving with a natural sadness that he was not paying that attachment to his food which the Savoy cooking demands, took pity on him and troubled him with no further questions about what he would like to eat, or to drink. He gave him such food and drink as seemed to his

trained knowledge likely to do the fullest credit to the hotel.

In this way Rupert ate a grilled lobster, a lamb cutlet *Valentinois*, a vol-au-vent Savoy, some inevitable *selle de mouton du pré salé*, some chicken *en diable*, the ice pudding he had mentioned earlier in the evening, and some Camembert cheese. He drank Berncastler Docter, Pol Roger '98 (the waiter's favorite champagne) a Grand Marnier with his ice pudding, and some '70 Port with his Camembert. For all the flavor he got of these foods and drinks, they might have been sawdust and water. This was manifestly love at first sight.

He kept gazing discreetly at the girl's beautiful face. Now and again it occurred to him that he was gazing too frankly, or at any rate, with too protracted a frankness, at it; and with considerable difficulty he diverted his eyes from it for a while. He diverted them always to her companion. He was quite sure that he had never seen anyone so solemn in his life. The fellow was as solemn as the girl was beautiful.

Presently, in the intervals of gazing at the girl, Rupert began to grow irritated by that solemnity. Then suddenly he perceived that it was disgraceful that such a beautiful and charming girl (He had no doubt whatever that she was as charming as she was beautiful) should be thrown away on such a dull dog. He must be dull; no one with a face like that

could be anything else. Also he must be a portentous bore; he talked and talked without ceasing. It must be appalling for the girl. Rupert felt sorry for her; he did not pride himself on being able to entertain girls with great brilliancy, but he must be better than a solemn idiot like that. The fellow scarcely gave the girl a chance of opening her mouth. Sometimes indeed he waited for her answer to something that he said, but that was all. Rupert's blood boiled; he knew that girls liked to do the talking themselves. They had sometimes, not often, talked to him.

Every time his eyes were drawn back to the girl, he grew cool again. Her beauty soothed him. When he was compelled by a sense of propriety to withdraw his eyes from her, his blood boiled afresh. He could not understand how it was that that solemn idiot could keep her smiling by his boring talk, and now and again draw from her a burst of the most delightful, rippling laughter. It was inconceivable—preposterous. Now and again the solemn idiot laughed himself. Rupert found it one of the most detestable laughs he had ever heard. There was something wrong about it. He was a little while perceiving what it was that was wrong with it; then he perceived that it did not match the solemnity of the fellow's face. He was disgusted.

Once or twice he felt that the Cosmic All was slightly out of joint; why should that idiot be talk-

ing and laughing with that beautiful girl, while he was dining alone? Whenever the gross injustice of this arrangement of the world struck him his face grew murderous. Once Nancy looked at him when it was at its most murderous. She did not avert her eyes immediately; she gazed at him earnestly; she wondered whether he was ill or whether it was merely a bad conscience. She thought him a very unpleasant-looking young man. With her it was not a case of love at first sight.

Then Rupert took a dislike to the fellow's figure; he found it too long and too broad and too thick. Then he took a dislike to his hands; he did not find them broad or thick enough. Also he disliked his clothes; he found that there was an effeminate finish about them. Last of all he noticed the fellow's feet; and they were the last straw, or rather straws. They were narrow and not very long. They were not manly feet. He was angry with the Cosmic All and with the solemn, but effeminate, idiot with the beautiful girl.

He was some time discovering what the fellow's profession could be. At first he thought that he was a bunco-steerer, or at any rate some kind of confidence-trick man; he was certainly a crook of some kind—if always he were not a whisky-drummer.

He acquired these foundations of an honest and healthy hatred, which he felt would last him a lifetime, in the intervals of gazing with rapture at the

girl. He was not really interested in her companion at all, he told himself so. Only he had never seen anyone whom he disliked more; and he could not gaze with rapture at the girl all the time; he had to look at something else now and then.

He saw the waiter bring them their coffee, and the man take out his cigarette case and offer the girl a cigarette. Rupert felt all the fury of those stern judges who condemned Socrates to death for corrupting the young; and he half rose to interfere. But the girl declined the cigarette with a smile; and Rupert sat down with his blood boiling again. He felt from the bottom of his heart that the fellow ought to be lynched.

Then a happy thought occurred to him; he beckoned his waiter to him and said: "Say, who is that lady dining at that table over there?"

"I don't know, sir," said the waiter.

"Does she often dine here?" said Rupert.

"I've only seen her here once before, sir," said the waiter.

"And who's that—that whisky-drummer with her?" said Rupert.

"Whisky-drummer, sir?" said the waiter in a pained tone. "That's the Marquess of Drysdale, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs."

"Ah, one of your effete aristocracy," said Rupert, bitterly.

"Er— yes, sir," said the waiter.

CHAPTER XV

RUPERT DRAYTON MAKES A FRIEND

RUPERT was not at all annoyed with himself at having made a mistake about the social position of the Marquess of Drysdale; he was much more annoyed to find that he was a Marquess and not a whisky-drummer. He was afraid lest the beautiful girl might be improperly impressed by the fellow's mere possession of a title. For the first time he was truly aware how he loathed titles.

He was gazing at them more gloomily than ever, when a large, fat man rose from a table on his right, went to their table, and began to talk to the Marquess. Rupert was struck by the curious shape of the fat man's nose; it had an unnatural, bulbous air, and was slightly askew.

The fat man was Mr. Shore-Wardell, whose nose had not yet resumed its natural unassuming proportions. He was dining with Colonel Webling; and like all the men within sight of her, he had been much struck by the beauty of Nancy. He had been observing her during dinner with even more interest than he had been observing Rupert; and he devised

an excuse for speaking to the Marquess for two excellent reasons. In the first place he hoped that the Marquess would introduce him to Nancy; in the second place he wished Rupert Drayton to see that he was on friendly terms with a distinguished nobleman. It was a sight to awake trust.

The Marquess did not greet him with any shining enthusiasm; he did not even smile upon him. But then the Marquess was not given to being lavish of smiles. He gazed at Mr. Shore-Wardell solemnly while Mr. Shore-Wardell, himself all smiles, deference and affability, set forth a scheme for an interesting match at auction bridge between four members of the Government, and four of the front bench of the Opposition. The Marquess remained solemn and unenthusiastic, and at the end of the exposition said that if Mr. Shore-Wardell liked to make all arrangements for the match, he would be very pleased to play. Mr. Shore-Wardell professed himself delighted with the Marquess's assent. The Marquess looked at him steadily with unswerving, solemn eyes; but he seemed to have nothing to add to that assent, certainly not an introduction to Nancy. Mr. Shore-Wardell withdrew.

He returned, smiling affably, to his table; and Rupert observed that his curiously shaped nose trembled to his smile in a very interesting way. Mr. Shore-Wardell sat down and damned the Marquess heartily for his insufferable airs. Rupert did not

hear this; he was wishing that he had been in the position to talk to the Marquess. He felt that nothing weaker than a traction engine would have withdrawn him from that nobleman without an introduction to Nancy.

Then the Marquess and Nancy rose; and when the Marquess put her cloak round her, the face of Rupert resumed its murderous expression. They went out of the restaurant; and with them, for Rupert, went half the glow of the electric lights. He was in two minds whether to follow them. It appeared to him, on reflection, that it would be a hopeless proceeding; they were probably going somewhere where he could not follow.

He put a lump of sugar in his coffee, which was growing cold, took a cigar from the box which the waiter had set beside him, and gazed gloomily round the darkened restaurant. His eyes fell on Mr. Shore-Wardell and Colonel Webling. They were looking at him, both of them, and plainly talking about him. Colonel Webling's face interested him; it was perhaps the face of a bird of prey, but it was certainly the face of a first-class fighting man. He gazed at it with frank interest.

Then Mr. Shore-Wardell rose and came to his table, his face wreathed with a most amiable smile.

"My name is Shore-Wardell—Herbert Shore-Wardell," he said, presenting his card to Rupert. "Please pardon my speaking to you like this; but

I have taken the liberty of making a bet about you—a harmless little bet—with my friend over there; and you can tell us which is the winner.”

Rupert's first thought was that Mr. Shore-Wardell was the inevitable bearer of the gold brick; then a happier thought struck him. This was an acquaintance of the Marquess of Drysdale! he had just seen him speak to him. He might be able to make use of him: through him he might become acquainted with the Marquess; and once acquainted with the Marquess, he was on his way to become acquainted with that peach of a girl.

“What was the bet?” he said politely.

“Well, I bet my friend a fiver that you were a Drayton—one of the Dorset Draytons. I made the bet on your likeness to General Drayton and two of his sons I know,” said Mr. Shore-Wardell, beaming.

“I am a Drayton; but I'm an American Drayton,” said Rupert.

“I didn't know that there were any American Draytons,” said Mr. Shore-Wardell, with a slight frown. “Well, I've lost my bet, and I'm much obliged to you for telling me.”

He made a half turn as if to go back to his table.

“Wait a bit,” said Rupert quickly, for he by no means wished to lose this fortunate chance of arriving at the acquaintance of the Marquess of Drysdale. “I don't know that you have lost that bet.

I'm an American Drayton; but in a way I'm an American Dorset Drayton."

"An American Dorset Drayton? That sounds very interesting," said Mr. Shore-Wardell; and he looked at Rupert suspiciously.

Rupert saw the look of suspicion as Mr. Shore-Wardell meant that he should; and he said, "May I come and smoke my cigar at your table and tell you about it?"

"By all means. I shall be charmed—charmed," said Mr. Shore-Wardell, somewhat reluctantly.

Rupert rose and went to their table. Mr. Shore-Wardell introduced him to Colonel Webling; explained that there was some doubt about who had won the bet, since Rupert was an American Dorset Drayton; and they sat down.

Both of them were a trifle frigid in their manner to Rupert, frigid with the coldness of men who had had an acquaintance they did not greatly desire thrust upon them. But when he had explained to them how one of the Dorset Draytons had emigrated to the United States a hundred and fifty years before and become his ancestor, and how his name was Rupert Christopher Drayton, and how his father, his grandfather and his great-grandfather had also been named Rupert Christopher Drayton, they thawed.

Then they discussed the matter of the bet, whether Mr. Shore-Wardell had won it or lost it, whether

in view of the fact that Drayton, though an American, was yet in a way a Dorset Drayton, since he belonged to that stock, the bet was off. Diplomatically, Drayton supported the point of view that Mr. Shore-Wardell had won the bet. He was interested in him, not in Colonel Webling; he desired to make Mr. Shore-Wardell his friend. In the end they took the view that since the main point of the matter was that Mr. Shore-Wardell had been backing his skill in recognizing family likenesses, and Rupert was a Drayton, Mr. Shore-Wardell had won his bet.

The Colonel paid over the five pounds; and Mr. Shore-Wardell insisted on all three of them having some of the bottle of '65 brandy which stood at his right hand. They talked about different matters, about Rupert's stay in England and how he was going to amuse himself; their interest in the matter, and indeed in Rupert himself, seemed purely polite and perfunctory. After a while he considered that he was now sufficiently well acquainted with them to invite them to come up to his sitting-room and smoke their cigars pleasantly, looking down over the river; and he did so.

Mr. Shore-Wardell looked at Colonel Webling and hesitated; then he accepted gracefully, and they all went upstairs. Rupert lingered behind them for a moment to bid the waiter send up to his room the rarest cigars and the oldest whisky the hotel had to offer.

In Rupert's room they lost more of their reserve. Mr. Shore-Wardell indeed grew genial and full of anecdote. Colonel Webling asked questions about the army of the United States. It was late in the evening before Rupert had found a chance of approaching the matter he had at heart; but at last the chance came.

"You know the Marquess of Drysdale, I think," he said to Mr. Shore-Wardell.

"Oh, yes; I know the Marquess of Drysdale; I know all the English marquesses, those of them who come to London at all. But I don't know him very well. I meet him at dinner pretty often and we belong to three of the same clubs; but I never dine at Drysdale House," said Mr. Shore-Wardell. "He's a rather queer fish, is the Marquess—one of those men with too many brains, wants to be Prime Minister or something of that kind. So you only meet him in political society—chiefly, that is—very dull."

"I want to make his acquaintance," said Rupert. "Do you know whether he has many American friends—I know a few Americans over here and I might meet him at one of their houses."

"I should think he has as many American friends as everyone else. So you want to make his acquaintance?" said Mr. Shore-Wardell, thoughtfully, and he looked at Rupert hard.

Rupert found himself flushing.

Mr. Shore-Wardell suddenly chuckled; and his face grew very waggish indeed: "Aha! I see how the land lies. I don't suppose you'd care a hang if you never saw the Marquess again as long as you made the acquaintance of the young lady who was dining with him to-night."

Rupert blushed more deeply, but said nothing. He was not going to deny it.

"Well, well; young blood—young blood," said Mr. Shore-Wardell and he chuckled again.

Then he turned grave and seemed to ponder. Then an expression of extreme frankness covered the whole expanse of his face: "As a matter of fact, I do not like the Marquess of Drysdale," he said slowly. "I shouldn't at all mind supplying him with a rival."

"You know the lady," said Rupert, quickly.

"I don't know her from Adam, or rather, I should say, from Eve," said Mr. Shore-Wardell. "No. All I could do would be to introduce you to the Marquess. The rest you'd have to do yourself."

"If you could do that, I should be deeply obliged, more obliged than I can say," said Rupert, earnestly.

"Right—right—I'll do that with pleasure. What kind of a game of bridge do you play?"

"Oh, I play a fair game—according to our standards," said Rupert, firmly, hoping to acquire some proficiency in it the next morning, since he had never played it in his life.

"You'll have to be prepared to play high, though," said Mr. Shore-Wardell.

"That's neither here nor there," said Rupert.

"Well, I'll try and arrange that you meet the Marquess at the bridge-table," said Mr. Shore-Wardell, rising and holding out his hand.

Rupert thanked him warmly, but Mr. Shore-Wardell protested that there was no need for thanks. He said that he would only be too charmed to play a little trick on the Marquess. Rupert walked down with them to the door of the hotel and bade them good-bye in the friendliest mood. He felt that in Mr. Shore-Wardell he had made a friend indeed.

CHAPTER XVI

RUPERT MEETS THE MARQUESS

RUPERT went up to his balcony, lighted yet another cigar, and sat dreaming dreams of the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. The dreams were troubled by the occasional intrusion of the solemn face and stalwart figure of the Marquess of Drysdale. Mr. Shore-Wardell and Colonel Webling turned on to the Embankment and strolled along it in that agreeable frame of mind which comes of a good dinner, good wine, good cigars, and the consciousness of having combined business with pleasure in a most satisfactory and agreeable fashion.

"Well, I think I brought that off rather neatly," said Mr. Shore-Wardell in a tone of gentle self-approval. "I did not need to make a friend of the young bore; the young bore made a friend of me. If I get him that introduction to Drysdale, it will make him my bosom friend for a month." He paused, considering; then he added: "I ought to be able to touch him for a bit, if it will not spoil the Chief's plan. I should like to touch the earnest

young dog. Well, that's the first stage; what's the next?"

"The next is to deliver him properly sandbagged, and with a broken leg, at No. 11 Malkin Lane," said Colonel Webling in his deep, rich voice.

"Is that all?" said Mr. Shore-Wardell. "I was hoping that the Chief meant to knock the strenuous young brute on the head. Did you notice the way he said: 'It's the mission of America to teach the world how to work, gentlemen?'"

"I did," said Colonel Webling, gloomily. "When I was his age I had killed quite a fair number of those Russian swine in the trenches before Plevna, and made up my mind that war was the only game for a gentleman. And this young sweep works in a store, and likes it. I'll break his leg myself. But the awkward thing is, that I haven't been able to see my way to do that sandbagging properly. I shall have to consult the Chief."

"Why not combine the introduction and the sandbagging?" said Mr. Shore-Wardell; and he laughed unpleasantly as if Rupert Drayton's fine strenuousness was still irking his flaccid soul.

"That's an idea," said Colonel Webling, brightening. "I'll put it to the Chief."

Accordingly at four o'clock the next afternoon Colonel Webling knocked at the door of the house on the Mall and asked if Mr. Mauleverer were in. Annie went to the back of the hall and asked the

question up a speaking tube. She came back and said that he was in, and conducted Colonel Webling to a door in the middle of the corridor leading to the garden. He heard the soft hissing sound of a descending lift, the door opened and awaiting him in the lift was a serious, slab-faced man in the sedate attire of an English valet, the faithful Pettigrew. He took Colonel Webling up to the third story, opened a door in the opposite side of the lift, led him down a short corridor, and ushered him into a sunny room, from the two windows of which was a charming view up the Thames. By the right-hand window sat Paul Mauleverer drinking his tea.

"How are you, Webling?" he said. "Will you have some tea?"

Colonel Webling looked at the tea tray with a doubtful air.

Paul Mauleverer laughed and said to his valet: "Bring whisky and soda, Pettigrew."

Pettigrew brought it and mixed him a drink; Colonel Webling lighted a cigar, and explained his errand and his difficulty. Paul Mauleverer heard with a pleasant smile the story of how Rupert Drayton had made friends with Mr. Shore-Wardell; but when Colonel Webling said that Rupert Drayton wished to make the acquaintance of the Marquess of Drysdale, in order that he might further make the acquaintance of the beautiful lady who had been dining with that nobleman the night before, Paul

Mauleverer laughed a sudden, short, rasping laugh, and said, "The deuce he does!"

Colonel Webling went on to unfold Mr. Shore-Wardell's idea of combining the introduction and the sandbagging.

Paul Mauleverer pondered it for a minute or two; then he said, "And why not? We want to get along with the business; and there's no point in wasting time. As for your difficulty in thinking out a good place for the sandbagging; there can be no better place than Malkin Lane, and no better spot in Malkin Lane than the pavement in front of No. 11. Sandbag him there; and there will be no need to use a motor-car to bring him there. You can just carry him in."

With that he went to the telephone, rang up the Marquess of Drysdale at his house in Berkeley Square, and found him in. In two minutes he had arranged that he should dine there at the house on the Mall on the following Friday and play bridge after dinner. Then he bade the Colonel ring up Mr. Shore-Wardell, tell him of the arrangement and bid him invite Rupert Drayton to dine with him that evening. The next morning Rupert Drayton was rejoiced to receive a letter bidding him come to Mr. Shore-Wardell's rooms in Jermyn Street at half-past seven on the Friday to dine and play bridge with the Marquess of Drysdale. Friday seemed a long time away to Rupert. He spent much of his time

acquiring the needful knowledge of bridge from a first-class teacher; the rest of it he spent looking for the beautiful girl.

At a few minutes to half-past seven on the Friday, he was at Mr. Shore-Wardell's rooms in Jermyn Street. There he found not only Mr. Shore-Wardell but also Colonel Webling. Mr. Shore-Wardell explained to him that they were not dining and playing bridge at his rooms, but at the house on the Mall. He said that it was the luckiest chance that Mauleverer had invited him to make up a four with the Marquess, for he had been able to say that he was pledged to Rupert for the evening and suggest that he should bring him to make up the party. In this way Rupert would not only get his introduction to the Marquess but would be able to make friends with him. Rupert thanked him warmly.

They took a taxicab and drove to the house on the Mall. Mr. Shore-Wardell had never been to it before. Always Paul Mauleverer had come to Jermyn Street to give his instructions about the part he was to play in the operation they had in hand, or he sent those instructions by Montague Burge or Colonel Webling. He was curious, very curious, to see the house of the Chief.

Annie opened the door to them; and they came into the hall. Mr. Shore-Wardell's appraising gaze wandered slowly round the prints on the walls as she took their hats and overcoats. At the top of the

first flight of stairs, in a niche in the wall, stood the statue of a woman. It came into the picture with extraordinary effectiveness. The hall was transformed; and the fine Italian staircase had gained that full value of which the smallness of the hall had robbed it.

Annie led the way up the staircase. When they came to the top of the first flight, Mr. Shore-Wardell stopped short before the statue and looked at it. As he gazed his eyes opened wide in the liveliest amazement. He stood staring at it; and the others went on up the stairs after Annie. Neither Rupert nor Colonel Webling were interested in sculpture. At the top of the second flight they waited for Mr. Shore-Wardell. Rupert was surprised and even a little shocked that he should be displaying his interest in an undraped female form in this open fashion. Mr. Shore-Wardell came slowly up the stairs to them, his brow knitted in a wondering frown. Half-way up the next flight he clutched Colonel Webling's arm and drew him back.

"That was the Cyprus Hebe—the stolen Hebe—the statue that there was all that fuss about three years ago," he whispered.

"Wonderful man, Mauleverer," said Colonel Webling, placidly.

When they came to the third story a corridor faced them.

Mr. Shore-Wardell observed at the mouth of it a

strong gate of beautiful wrought-iron drawn back against the wall. He took it that in the old days it had been used to shut off the children's nurseries. As a matter of fact, it shut off Paul Mauleverer's rooms from the rest of the house.

Annie ushered them into the room where Colonel Webling had talked with Paul Mauleverer; and there he was awaiting them. Mr. Shore-Wardell shook hands with him, and introduced Rupert. Then his eyes wandered round the room and opened wider than ever. In a niche in the wall stood the statue of a woman. He stared at it and rubbed his eyes. It was the statue of the Cyprus Hebe—the statue which three minutes before he had seen in the niche on the stairs.

"Ah, you're looking at my Hebe," said Paul Mauleverer. "Beautiful thing, isn't it?"

"B-but it's t-the same statue I saw on the stairs as I came up," stammered Mr. Shore-Wardell.

Rupert perceived that it was a copy of the statue on the stairs.

Paul Mauleverer laughed gently. "It might be a replica," he said. "On the other hand, these old houses are full of surprises. One of these days, Shore-Wardell, I must show you the surprises in this house."

He smiled as he said it; but Mr. Shore-Wardell did not like his tone. He felt rather than actually perceived a faint menace in it.

He went to the statue and looked at it closely. Mauleverer came to his side; and they discussed it. Then the door opened; and Pettigrew said, "The Marquess of Drysdale."

Paul Mauleverer drew a curtain across the niche, hiding the statue; and the Marquess entered. His face wore its usual air of ineffable solemnity. He nodded to Mauleverer and shook hands with Mr. Shore-Wardell. Mauleverer introduced Colonel Webling to him and then Rupert. Rupert found that the dislike of him, which he had acquired in the Savoy Restaurant, had by no means abated.

They dined in the adjoining room, and Pettigrew waited on them. The dinner was simple—soup, salmon, lamb, gooseberry tart, and Stilton cheese—a simple English meal. The cooking was admirable, as were the wines, Hock and Champagne. Rupert found it the best meal he had eaten in England.

The talk was rather trivial. They discussed sport, plays, dancers, dinners, pictures and women. They talked chiefly of women and with a lack of the chivalry to which Rupert was unused. Two or three times Paul Mauleverer, or the Marquess, turned the talk on to the States that Rupert might have his part in it. The Marquess seemed to take no little interest in American institutions and problems; of the business conditions of the States he showed

himself woefully ignorant; and of English politics he never said a word.

At the end of dinner Paul Mauleverer said to Rupert: "I thought that since this is your first visit to England, Mr. Drayton, I would give you English food."

Rupert said that it was fine; and Mr. Shore-Wardell said that there was none better. Colonel Webling took him up and said that there were Turkish dishes that were better than anything English. The Marquess said that in most countries the food of the country was best. "If it chances to be a country in which there is any food," he added.

After their coffee they went to Paul Mauleverer's smoking-room to play bridge. Rupert was feeling that he seemed to have made but little way with the Marquess and he was somewhat annoyed when they cut as partners; he did not wish to nip their budding acquaintance in the bud by playing badly. But he had thrown all himself into learning the game; and his play passed muster. Indeed the Marquess and he won the first two rubbers. This successful partnership seemed to bring them together. Then the Marquess cut out. He sat down by Rupert and watched them play the first hand, then he went quietly out of the room. At the end of the rubber he had not returned; and they went on playing without him.

Rupert never dreamed that within forty yards of

him the Marquess was sitting in Mr. Wilson's sitting-room in the power-house, talking, with ineffable solemnity, to the beautiful girl whom he had seen at the Savoy.

CHAPTER XVII

RUPERT IS CHECKED

THEY were in the middle of a rubber when the Marquess returned. Certainly there was nothing in his face to show that he had been entertaining a pretty girl; he might very well have come straight from an interview with an undertaker. He sat down by Rupert and talked to him, when he was dummy, of the difference between English and American bridge, declaring that Americans in general and Rupert in particular did not play a forward enough game. Rupert debated the point amicably, pointing out that in the first two rubbers the Marquess had twice called a light no-trumper and lost the trick on both calls. The Marquess cut into the next rubber; and Rupert, who cut out, sat by him and discussed his play, suggesting greater caution. At last he was beginning to improve his acquaintance with the Marquess. They played one more rubber and stopped though Mauleverer urged them to go on. They stood for a while, talking, as they drank a last brandy and soda; and Rupert talked with the Marquess.

Then Mr. Shore-Wardell and Colonel Webling said that they must be going. It would have been natural for Rupert to go with them; but he had come to the house with a definite purpose; and he was not going to leave it till that purpose had been accomplished. Mr. Shore-Wardell made it easier for him to stay by saying: "There's no need for us to drag you away, Drayton. You don't need the early hours that we do."

When Colonel Webling and Mr. Shore-Wardell came down the stairs, they found the stolen Hebe in the niche at the top of the first flight.

For half an hour the Marquess, Rupert and Mauleverer talked. Then the Marquess said that he must be going; and the three of them came down the stairs. They had put on their hats and coats, Mauleverer had opened the door, Rupert was going down the steps, and the Marquess was on the top of them.

"By Jove! I'd quite forgotten, I've heard something about Morton's contesting South Manchester as soon as Wilkinson resigns. I want to talk to you about it," said Mauleverer to the Marquess. "Drayton can find his way to the High Road all right. You don't mind, Drayton?"

Rupert did mind, but he could not say so. He said that he could easily find his way up to the High Road.

"You take the first turning to the left, just at the

end of the garden wall; and the High Road runs along the top of it."

"Right," said Rupert.

They bade him good-night; and Mauleverer shut the door.

Rupert went along the Mall and turned up Malkin Lane, feeling greatly annoyed. His best chance of improving his acquaintance with the Marquess had been snatched from him. He walked along slowly, pondering what next step he should take. He must hustle things along; but it was plain to him that the Marquess lived in a world in which hustling did not prevail. He would be compelled to move slowly. He did not think that the Marquess was at all likely to call on him; why should he? Their acquaintance had not progressed far enough. He must try to use Mr. Shore-Wardell again. He could call on him; and he favored his design of becoming the Marquess's rival. Then he had a happy idea; he would find a bridge-playing fellow-countryman and get Mr. Shore-Wardell to invite the Marquess to take part in a match, Americans versus English.

Busy with these reflections, he did not perceive that Crinkly Billson, coming up the lane behind him, was on the point of catching him up. He was just smiling with satisfaction at the excellent plan he had hit upon, when Montague Burge stopped him in front of No. 11 with the request for a match.

As Rupert put his hand into his pocket for his match-box, Montague Burge knocked his hat off with the cane he carried, and Billson swung the stocking-foot full of sand on to the back of his head. He fell like a log, without even a groan.

Billson caught him by the shoulders, Montague Burge by the ankles; and they carried him into No. 11, the door of which had been left unshut to let them quickly in. They carried him into the dining-room and laid him out on the table. Montague Burge switched on the electric light. The pugilist slid Rupert along till his legs projected over the edge of the table, straightened the left leg out, and struck it a tremendous blow a few inches above the ankle. The tibia snapped.

Without a word Montague Burge switched off the electric light; and they went out of the house and walked swiftly up to the High Road.

At the top of Malkin Lane they halted for a moment.

"That didn't tyke long," said the pugilist in a tone of great satisfaction.

Montague Burge took a bag out of his pocket, a bag that chinked. "You never earned a hundred golden sovereigns quicker," he said; and he handed the bag to the pugilist.

"I don't think," said the pugilist, cheerfully, putting it into his pocket. "Good-night."

"Good-night," said Montague Burge, and they went their different ways.

Rupert lay on the table, breathing stertorously for perhaps a quarter of an hour. The house was very still; not even the clock on the chimney-piece was ticking. Then there came the sound of slow footsteps mounting the kitchen stairs; and Andrew Rawnsley came into the room, switched on an electric hand-lamp, and ran the ray of light along Rupert's recumbent form. He went back to the top of the kitchen stairs and called quietly down them: "It's all right."

He went back to the dining-room; there came the sound of other footsteps coming up the stairs and along the hall; and Pettigrew came into the room.

"Catch hold, and let's get him along," said Andrew Rawnsley, taking hold of Rupert under the arms.

Pettigrew took him by the feet and they carried him along the hall, down the stairs, and into the cellar.

As they laid him down on the cellar floor Andrew Rawnsley said earnestly: "I wish these Americans weren't so heavy."

"Thirteen stun, I should say he weighed, sir," said Pettigrew.

"Every ounce of it," said Andrew Rawnsley; and he pressed the spring which opened the revolving door in the cellar wall.

They had some difficulty in squeezing the inert Rupert through the narrow opening; then they carried him down the steps into the underground passage. A few feet down it stood a light, narrow ambulance about two feet high and six feet long; it filled the passage; and Pettigrew crawled over it to the other side. Then Andrew Rawnsley raised Rupert's head and shoulders on to it; Pettigrew leaned over it, and got a grip on him, and lugged him at full length on to it.

Then it was comparatively easy going, for the ambulance ran along smoothly on large casters. They wheeled him to the steps leading to the circular cellar, carried him up them and laid him on the floor. Then they brought up the ambulance, set him on it, wheeled him to the lift, and took him up to the top of the house.

They laid him on a bed in a large, airy room. Pettigrew went downstairs to the telephone, rang up a doctor in Hammersmith, and bade him come as quickly as possible, and bring with him everything necessary for setting a broken leg. Then he went upstairs and with the help of Andrew Rawnsley undressed Rupert and got him into bed. Then he turned out his pockets. Andrew Rawnsley took Rupert's note-case which contained about £200. The £20 in gold which was in his trouser pockets he gave to Pettigrew.

"It had better look as if robbery had been the motive of the crime," said Andrew Rawnsley.

Then Pettigrew fetched his wife to watch over Rupert; and they went downstairs to await the coming of the doctor. In twenty minutes he knocked at the door and Pettigrew brought him to Andrew Rawnsley in the library.

"Good morning, doctor; I've got another patient for you—a knock on the head and a broken leg. It looks like another hundred guinea fee," said Andrew Rawnsley.

The doctor smiled all over his broad, brown face, rubbed his hands gently together, and said: "These accidents—these accidents. I'd better be getting to work at once before the muscles stiffen.

"Come along," said Andrew Rawnsley, and he led him up to Rupert's room by a smaller staircase in the right wing of the house.

The doctor examined Rupert and said: "Ah, yes, concussion of the brain—not very severe. He'll come to his senses in a few hours."

Then without further delay he set Rupert's broken leg. He set it carefully; and it did not take him very long; it was a very simple fracture. He gave Mrs. Pettigrew some instructions about keeping Rupert comfortable and told her to give him nothing but milk and soda till he came again. Then he went downstairs with Andrew Rawnsley, saying it was a very simple case, though the young fellow

would probably have to lie up for six weeks, and departed.

Andrew Rawnsley went into the dining-room and mixed himself a whisky and soda. As he drank it his face grew lowering and grim. He said to himself that now he was free to deal with Mr. Shore-Wardell and Crinkly Billson.

CHAPTER XVIII

MONTAGUE BURGE SEEKS AN INTERVIEW WITH THE CHIEF

THE fury of Montague Burge at the loss of Nancy and the loss of his revenge had abated very little; it burned with an even and steady flame. Sometimes he was more furious with Andrew Rawnsley for robbing him of his revenge; sometimes he was more furious with himself for not having been sure of it before he tried to take it.

He had grown thoroughly alive to the fact that in his rage he had played the fool. He should never have attempted revenge at all: what good would he have got out of it? No, he should have used his trap. He had had Nancy in it; and instead of flying into that silly fury with the aggravating little devil, he should have shown her that she was in it, that it rested with him whether she went to prison or not. . . . Oh, he had played the fool! . . . He could have worked on her terrors till he had got her into a state of utter panic. . . . He could have frightened her out of her life. . . . She'd have stopped giving herself airs quickly enough.

. . . She would have listened kindly enough to his wooing. . . . He had been a fool!

But it was no good wasting time being angry with himself and worrying about a mistake there was no mending. . . . He hated Andrew Rawnsley and even more he hated Nancy. . . . The question was how was he to get level with both of them. . . . The first thing to do plainly was to clear Andrew Rawnsley out of the way. . . . Till that was done there was no hope of taking vengeance on Nancy. . . . Andrew Rawnsley would save her again.

Having reached this conclusion, he gave all his attention to the problem of clearing Andrew Rawnsley out of his path. The more he considered it the more difficult it grew. During his association with his employer he had lost any objection he might have entertained in more innocent days, to crimes of violence, or indeed to crimes of any kind; but he still retained a warm affection for his own neck. Besides, the crimes of violence in which he had taken part had not been of his own planning. When he tried to form the plan of a crime of violence of which Andrew Rawnsley should be the subject, none but the crudest and manifestly most dangerous plan would form itself. Try as he would he could devise none that was really feasible and satisfactory. He began to realize that such plans were the finest fruits of a peculiar form of genius.

Then he began to reproach himself for having shown his hand to Andrew Rawnsley. If he did form a plan, he would have to execute it in the face of a man forewarned. He had never cherished a high opinion of his employer's powers indeed, at any rate, for his criminal powers; all his respect and admiration were given to this mysterious Chief in the background, the Chief who wove webs of crime of so faultless a symmetry. But he began to suspect that he might have under-rated his employer. He had looked for Andrew Rawnsley to try to propitiate him; Andrew Rawnsley made no such attempt. He treated Montague Burge with a grim scorn. He never uttered a soothing or placating word. When Montague Burge came to his office in the morning, Andrew Rawnsley gazed at him with coldly hostile eyes and spoke to him like a dog. He showed himself utterly fearless; and his fearlessness began to daunt Montague Burge. What if that mysterious and ingenious Chief, at his employer's instigation, were weaving one of his diabolical webs round him.

He began to grow uneasy; but like the bluff, dishonest Englishman he was, he did not soften his manner towards his employer. He was sulky, defiant, rebellious. Andrew Rawnsley did not like his air; but he was not very greatly put about by it. He had the warmest admiration of his manager's knowledge of precious stones, but of the rest of his attainments he had a poor opinion. Besides, the

only ground on which Montague Burge could attack him was his practice of selling the jewels stolen by Mauleverer's men for rather more than their full price, sometimes indeed for much more than their full price, in the open market. And on that ground Montague Burge could only attack him by ruining himself. No; Montague Burge was a born subordinate, a man who could do as he was told quite well, but a man without the power of initiative at any time to do anything of himself. Nevertheless in these awkward and ticklish games with other people's jewels a rebellious subordinate was not desirable. Andrew Rawnsley began to feel yet more strongly that he had already had all the good that was coming to him from Montague Burge.

Then Montague Burge had a brilliant idea. Why should he not win over the Chief to his side? Against him and the Chief Andrew Rawnsley would be helpless. It should be easier to devise a plan for winning over the Chief; that was a matter of business, not of crime. Of course he would have to make the Chief see that it was to his advantage to throw over Andrew Rawnsley. He did not know what share of the fifty thousand pounds profit, which the Emporium was making out of the theft of the Aldington jewels, would go to the Chief; but he was quite sure that Andrew Rawnsley would secure for himself the bulk of it. Yet if the Chief and he were to put their heads together, he was no less

sure that they could devise some plan by which, while he himself continued to receive the modest share of the profit that he was getting at present, the Chief would receive a great deal more. Indeed, if Andrew Rawnsley were once removed from their path, it would not be difficult, with the help of the Chief, to devise a plan by which he himself should sell the jewels they acquired to the Emporium. Whatever happened to Andrew Rawnsley, the Emporium would still go on; and he saw no likelihood that any new proprietor of it would dispense with his services as manager of the jewelry department. His results had been too good.

How then was he to get at the Chief? . . . Undoubtedly Colonel Webling was the man to arrange an interview. . . . Webling knew the Chief. . . . It was from Webling that he had learned that the Chief's name was Mauleverer. . . . Moreover, Webling had always shown himself a man of sense as well as a most capable leader. . . . He might almost take him into his confidence. . . . At any rate he would sound him with a view to taking him into his confidence.

Accordingly he invited Colonel Webling to dine with him at the Ritz. The Colonel was fond of a good dinner; and he knew that Montague Burge would give him one. He accepted the invitation, wondering a little why they were dining at the Ritz and not at No. 11 Malkin Lane.

They dined at eight o'clock; and as they sat down at the table which Montague Burge had had reserved for them, the first person on whom his eyes rested was Nancy Weston. For a moment, owing to the transforming frock, he thought that his eyes were playing him false. Then he saw that it was indeed Nancy Weston.

Then Colonel Webling said: "There's the Marquess of Drysdale with that pretty girl again." And he nodded towards the table at which they were sitting.

"Is that solemn-looking owl the Marquess of Drysdale?" said Montague Burge, in a tone in which surprise, disgust and anger were evenly mingled.

"Yes; and she's a very pretty girl, though not of the type I really like," said Colonel Webling, placidly.

Montague Burge gazed at Nancy, scowling. He recognized the other man at the table as her uncle, Herbert Wilson. He took an instant, strong dislike to the Marquess; and when he saw that Herbert Wilson seemed to be eating his dinner in a trance, that the talk at their table was confined to Nancy and the Marquess, and that she was plainly taking the keenest pleasure in it, his dislike grew.

They seemed to have begun their dinner some little time before he and Colonel Webling; and at a few minutes past the half-hour they left the res-

taurant. But they had stayed long enough to upset utterly Montague Burge. He took no pleasure in his dinner; he talked in a jerky, absent-minded fashion; and in the end he came to his delicate negotiations with Colonel Webling in an unfortunate condition of consuming irritation.

Colonel Webling, on the contrary, came to them with all his wits about him. He had brought to the appreciation of that excellent dinner the fine Oriental calm he had acquired in the service of the Sultan; and nothing had disturbed it. The jerkiness and absent-mindedness of his host had awakened not only his curiosity but his caution. He felt that Montague Burge was going to discuss with him a matter of considerable importance.

It came about then that Montague Burge broached the subject with far greater abruptness and much less sounding than he had intended.

"I've been thinking that Shore-Wardell was quite right when he said that we ought to get a much bigger share of the proceeds of the jewels we keep getting hold of," he said suddenly, frowning.

"I seem to get a very good share," said Colonel Webling, carelessly.

"But you ought to get more. We all ought to get more," said Montague Burge, in a tone of great decision.

"We ought, ought we?" said Colonel Webling in

a tone of some indifference, examining with approving eyes the ash of his cigar.

"Yes, we ought," said Montague Burge, with even greater emphasis. "The fact is there's no need for old Rawnsley—no need whatever."

"Who is old Rawnsley?" said Colonel Webling with a little more interest, removing his keen eyes swiftly from the ash of his cigar to the face of his host. He had sometimes wondered about the man with whom Paul Mauleverer shared the House on the Mall.

Montague Burge hesitated. He had not meant to plunge into the middle of things quite like this. Besides, Colonel Webling was evidently less in the confidence of the Chief than he had supposed. But he had started, and he had to go on.

"He's the man who buys the jewels we get hold of, and makes a tremendous profit on them," he said.

"I see; the fence," said Colonel Webling.

"Yes; and there's no need for him, none whatever. I can sell the jewels to the same customers as he does; and I can get as much money for them as he does. All that extra money would come to us. It would make a difference of thousands."

"The deuce it would!" said Colonel Webling.

"Yes; old Rawnsley is just an extra, unnecessary person taking a big lump of the profits. If he were out of the way there'd be more for all of us; and

I want to see the Chief and talk it over with him."

"Do you?" said Colonel Webling; and his keen eyes seemed suddenly to go dull and a trifle sleepy.

"Yes, I do," said Montague Burge, firmly. "Where does he live?"

"I don't know," said Colonel Webling. "When there is anything on, he always comes round to my place and tells me there what we're to do."

"Well, when the Chief hears what I want to discuss with him, he'll be anxious to talk it over with me," said Montague Burge, with great decision. "I want you to put it to him and arrange an interview."

"I see; well, I'll do my best to arrange it," said Colonel Webling.

Montague Burge was not satisfied with this assurance; for the rest of the evening with business-like persistence he continued to urge the Colonel to arrange the interview. In the end his persistence bored Colonel Webling exceedingly; he grew tired of repeating his assurance that he would do his best. At last, out of sheer boredom, he ceased to pay any heed to what Montague Burge was saying. He simply enjoyed his cigars and brandy and soda, and thought of more pleasant things. As they parted at half-past eleven at the door of the Ritz, Montague Burge was still dwelling on the subject. His last words were: "You'll be sure and use every effort to make the Chief see me, me personally. We must clear Andrew Rawnsley out of the way."

For all Montague Burge's adjurations, Colonel Webling did not put himself about to convey his request to Paul Mauleverer. He saw no urgency in the matter, for he was strongly of the opinion that were anything to be gained by getting rid of this man Rawnsley, Paul Mauleverer would have seen it long before Montague Burge. But an opportunity of conveying that worthy's message presented itself to him almost immediately; and he took it.

It was an opportunity which gave him no pleasure at all. Two afternoons later he returned home unexpectedly at the hour which he was wont to devote to a game of poker at the Fossickers' Club. He found Paul Mauleverer stretched on a divan, smoking a narghileh, with a cup of coffee by his side, talking with lively animation to Mrs. Webling. Colonel was more annoyed than surprised at the sight. He was indeed very deeply annoyed; and he greeted them, frowning. Zoräide looked confused; perhaps his frown confused her. Paul Mauleverer greeted him with pleasant unconcern.

"I came up on the chance of finding you in," he said. "I wanted to talk to you about that little matter of Shore-Wardell."

"Why didn't you ring me up, here or at the club, and let me know you were coming? Come along into my room," said Colonel Webling; and there was no welcoming warmth in his voice.

Paul Mauleverer picked up his narghileh and came.

As he settled himself down on the divan, Colonel Webling said: "I have been meaning to ring you up, or come and see you; our friend Burge is very keen on having a talk with you."

"Is he?" said Paul Mauleverer, shortly.

"Yes; he has a scheme which he says will be greatly to your advantage—to the advantage of us all."

"Has he?" said Paul Mauleverer without any enthusiasm. "What is it?"

"He wants to get rid of a man of the name of Rawnsley—your fence. He says that he can do everything that Rawnsley does, and we can save Rawnsley's share of the loot for ourselves," said Colonel Webling; and he still gazed at Mauleverer with gloomy eyes.

"Is that all?" snarled Paul Mauleverer. "Well, you can tell him from me that Rawnsley is of more use to me than a dozen Burges. Burge knows that he is. I see his game; he's been telling you this story to make you dissatisfied. Look here; I said the other day that Burge was getting unsafe and had better go. He'd better go quicker than I thought. In fact, Webling, he shall take precedence of Shore-Wardell."

"Well, it's always three hundred pounds," said Colonel Webling, brightening.

CHAPTER XIX

RUPERT MEETS NANCY

THE next morning the doctor put Rupert's broken leg into plaster of Paris; and for the next three days, what with his aching head and his aching leg, Rupert was very miserable indeed. At night he had much more fever than sleep; and the day was no better. His mind cleared slowly; but he could not remember how he had come where he was. Mrs. Pettigrew could only tell him that he had been found lying in Malkin Lane, insensible and with a broken leg, and that her master, Mr. Rawnsley, had had him brought to his house and sent for a doctor. The doctor, who came every day, could throw no more light on the matter.

Rupert could understand his aching head, for it was clear enough that he had been sandbagged. But his broken leg was a puzzle to him; he could not conceive how it had been broken. The thieves had cleared his pockets; why should they break his leg? It must have been sheer clumsiness. But how had they found an opportunity to be so clumsy with a sandbagged and insensible man.

He spent most of the three days and nights, trying to find a position in which he could lie comfortably. It was a difficult task and kept him fully occupied. He was, fortunately, in as healthy a condition as so strenuous a worker could expect to be; and the aching of his head at last passed away, the aching of his leg grew duller. On the morning of the fourth day, he slept for three hours without awaking once; and he awoke in a far more cheerful frame of mind. That cheerfulness did not last long; he was now in a condition to realize that he was losing the golden hours he had intended to employ in making his way through the Marquess of Drysdale to the beautiful girl he had seen in the Savoy Restaurant. It was a bitter thought; and in about an hour he had chafed himself into a high temperature. However that night he enjoyed four hours unbroken sleep.

The next day after lunch, Mr. Rawnsley, benevolent and beaming, appeared at his bedside, introduced himself and congratulated him on having got over the worst of his troubles. Rupert wanted to thank him for the kindness with which he had played the good Samaritan. But Mr. Rawnsley refused to be thanked. Rupert asked him how he had been brought to the house.

Mr. Rawnsley told him that a Mr. Burge, the manager of the Jewelry Department of his Emporium, returning home late at night, had found him

lying insensible on the pavement in the middle of Malkin Lane, and had carried him into his house, No. 11. Then he had come round to the house on the Mall to borrow a motor-car to take him to a hospital. Mr. Rawnsley had had him brought to the house on the Mall instead; and with his venerable air, Mr. Rawnsley looked the very man to play the good Samaritan in this noble fashion. Then he asked him how he had come to be in this neighborhood so late; and Rupert told him that he had been playing bridge at the house of a Mr. Mauleverer.

"But this is amazing!" cried Mr. Rawnsley. "You were playing bridge in this house. Mauleverer shares it with me. He has been out of town since the morning after your misfortune, and so has heard nothing about it."

Rupert agreed that it was indeed amazing; and when they came to work out the details of the crime, they came to the conclusion that the Marquess of Drysdale must have passed up Malkin Lane a few minutes after Mr. Burge had carried Rupert into No. 11. Then they discussed the matter of the broken leg which was still puzzling Rupert. Mr. Rawnsley was of the opinion that he had broken it in falling. Rupert was quite sure that his was not the kind of leg which a mere fall would break. The matter was left in its obscurity.

When Mr. Rawnsley learned that Rupert was the son of the Drayton, the multi-millionaire depart-

ment-store proprietor, of Chicago, he was more interested in him than ever. He beamed on him broadly as he explained that he was the proprietor of a department store himself, and had drawn many of his methods of managing it from those followed, and indeed devised, by the Drayton firm in Chicago. He was very pleased to learn that Rupert was his father's partner and took a great part in the work of the store. He promised himself many pleasant conversations with his young confrère. Before leaving him he asked Rupert if he would not like someone to read to him. But Rupert, desiring to enjoy undisturbed some dreams of the beautiful friend of the Marquess of Drysdale, declined the offer. He did not know what he was declining.

He slept well that night; and he awoke next morning quite himself again, barring his weakness and his aching leg. But the better he grew the more he chafed at being chained to his bed, wasting the golden hours. It grew plain to him that to give himself every chance with that beautiful girl he might have to remain several months in England instead of the six weeks he had allowed himself. He chafed again at this, for he was loth to leave for so long the work he loved.

That morning, after he had signed his letters, Mr. Rawnsley said to Nancy: "This afternoon I want you to read for an hour or two to a young

friend of mine. He's laid up in my house with a broken leg."

"Yes, sir; what time shall I read to him?" said Nancy.

"From about half-past two till half-past four. A couple of hours will be plenty," said Mr. Rawnsley.

Nancy was relieved to hear that she would be free at half-past four. The Marquess was coming to tea; and she did not wish to be away from home. She felt that she could not trust her uncle to give him his tea as he liked it.

"You'll be nice to my friend?" said Mr. Rawnsley. "His leg has given him a good deal of pain."

"Oh, yes; of course I shall be nice to him," said Nancy.

"Very nice," said Mr. Rawnsley; and he beamed on her with great benevolence.

"Yes," said Nancy, wondering why her employer should make such a point of her doing such an obvious thing.

"I think you will do him good—cheer him up," said Mr. Rawnsley.

When Mrs. Pettigrew ushered her into Rupert's room at half-past two she found him sleeping peacefully. She was not greatly attracted by his face; but that was not the fault of his features. Its lack of attraction was owing to the fact that he had a six days' beard on his chin.

She did not think it right to wake an invalid;

she sat quietly down by the side of his bed and began to read the book, "Old Gordon Graham," which Mr. Rawnsley had given Mrs. Pettigrew to give her, as being a book very cheering to an invalid. She presently became so absorbed in it that she forgot all about Rupert.

A quarter of an hour later, Rupert awoke, opened his eyes, and they fell on Nancy's face. He thought that he was dreaming, and he kept very still lest he should disturb the vision. In a little more than a minute the conviction seized him that he was awake. Then he found himself unable to believe his eyes though they were as wide open as they could possibly be. He kept still for another minute. His eyes refused to present anything to him but the face of Nancy. He rubbed them cautiously. It was not a vision; it was the beautiful girl of the Savoy Restaurant!

He lay quite still and silent for two or three minutes, letting his eyes have their fill of delight. Presently he began to desire to hear her voice; and he coughed. Nancy raised her head and smiled at him. The smile dazzled him; he blinked.

"You're awake at last," said Nancy, smiling at him again. "I didn't like to wake you because the more sleep an invalid gets the better it is for him. Would you like me to read to you?"

"I'd rather you talked to me," said Rupert.

Nancy looked at him and knitted her brow. On

being called on to talk, every subject, very naturally, slipped out of her head with graceful alacrity. She flushed a little under his steady, frank gaze. "What do you want me to talk about?" she said.

"About yourself," said Rupert, promptly.

Nancy was somewhat at a loss. At the moment she could not think of anything about herself to tell him. Besides, she did not know that she wanted to talk about herself to this somewhat bearded stranger, even though he was an invalid and ought to be humored. She smiled and said: "No, let's talk about you. That will be much more interesting; you're an American, aren't you? And I never met an American before in my life."

"You never met an American?" said Rupert, amazed.

"I've always lived in the country till lately," said Nancy.

"Was it a romantic spot?" said Rupert.

Nancy smiled. "It was very pretty," she said. "But I don't know about its being romantic."

"Wasn't there an old feudal castle, or a ruined abbey there?" said Rupert.

"I don't think there was a castle or a ruin for ten miles round, only old Roman camps; and they're just mounds and banks and ditches," said Nancy.

"I thought that there were ruins all about the country in England," said Rupert. "But you yourself, I suppose, lived in an old manor house."

"Oh, no; I lived in a cottage—at least it was called Myrtle Cottage, though it had eight rooms," said Nancy. "Only rich people live in manor houses; and my aunt wasn't rich. I'm Mr. Rawnsley's secretary."

Rupert was surprised. Since he had seen her dining with the Marquess of Drysdale he had naturally jumped to the conclusion that she was a lady of good birth, one of the aristocracy, perhaps titled.

"But I saw you dining with the Marquess of Drysdale at the Savoy Restaurant," he said in tones which revealed his surprise.

"Did you? That's curious," said Nancy, flushing a little. "I don't remember seeing you there."

Since, when her eyes had chanced to fall on him during that dinner, his face had been at its most murderous, and clean-shaven, it was not unnatural that she should fail to recognize it now that it was pleasant and somewhat bearded. Yet Rupert was disappointed; he had hoped that his face had made at least so much impression on her that she had remembered it.

"Didn't you?" he said, rather gloomily; then he hesitated, and added: "But you were dining with the Marquess of Drysdale."

"Oh, yes; he's a friend—a friend of my uncle. Only my uncle couldn't go with us that evening," said Nancy, flushing again.

"Ah, Mr. Rawnsley's your uncle, is he?" said Rupert.

"No, no; my uncle's name is Wilson. He's the engineer of Mr. Rawnsley's power-house, which lights this house and the Emporium and works the lifts. Mr. Rawnsley built the power-house before there were any electric companies near—years ago."

Rupert was puzzled. It seemed to him strange that the niece of the engineer of the power-house of a store should dine with a marquess at a fashionable restaurant. He had had an idea that English noblemen were arrogant, except when it was a question of marrying the daughters of American millionaires.

"I've met the Marquess—the night I got my leg broken. He's a solemn sort of dub; it must be pretty dull dining with him," said Rupert, thoughtfully.

"No, it isn't. He's not nearly as solemn as he looks," protested Nancy.

This was what Rupert had feared, and he frowned.

Nancy, who was somewhat eager to get away from the subject of the Marquess, asked him how he had come to break his leg; and he told her the mysterious story. She was full of the liveliest interest and sympathy; and he found her concern indeed delightful. Then she perceived that he was tired, and insisted that he should stop talking and let her read him to sleep. She did read to him; but he did

not sleep, nor did he listen with any great intentness to the story. He was enjoying the play of changing expression on her beautiful face and the delightful tones of her voice. At half-past four she left him; she could not let her uncle give the Marquess his tea.

Rupert did not go to sleep; he lay thinking about her. His ideas needed to be readjusted. He had had it in his mind that she was an English aristocrat; and now he learned that she was a girl who earned her own living. His feelings were somewhat mixed. In his lover's dreams he had seen himself bearing off the most beautiful and best-born daughter of the English aristocracy; and in those dreams it had been a splendid feat, but bristling with difficulties. It would surely be easier to win a working girl. Nevertheless for a while he fancied that he hankered after the splendid feat. Then her beautiful face came floating again before the eyes of his mind; and he saw quite clearly that what he wanted was Nancy herself, and it did not make a pin's difference whether she were an English aristocrat or a working girl.

Then he congratulated himself on the fact that she was a working girl; it would make his task easier—to the working girl the worker appeals. Suddenly he thought of the Marquess, and quivered to a spasm of jealousy. Then he began to wonder. . . . A marquess and a working girl? . . . Was it

quite on the square? . . . These marquesses had a bad name. . . . Could that solemn idiot be fooling Nancy?

A flame of indignant rage flashed up in him; if the Marquess of Drysdale was trying to fool Nancy, he would find himself up against him.

CHAPTER XX

THE TROUBLES OF INSPECTOR GIFFEN

THE world was not going well with Inspector Giffen. More than six weeks had passed since Lady Aldington had been kidnapped and robbed of thirty thousand pounds worth of jewels; and the Inspector had not found the slightest clue to one of the three grey-bearded men who had perpetrated the crime. They seemed to have risen out of the earth in Rutland Gate and sunk into it again on Chipperfield Common.

He had worked on his theory that it had been the work of American crooks and had got nothing by it. The American crooks staying in the big hotels had been watched, for that matter they were always being watched; and all possible inquisition had been made into their doings on the night of the twenty-first of April.

No less careful attention had been paid to the American crooks staying in the boarding-houses in Bloomsbury or in rooms round Leicester Square. The better class criminals of England had not been neglected; the most careful investigations had been

made into the occupations on the night of the robbery of all of them the police knew to be capable of working out so audacious a crime. Inspector Giffen had had the assistance of three-quarters of the whole of the detective force of London. Both Lord and Lady Aldington had friends who could put pressure on the heads of Scotland Yard; and they were putting it. But all these inquisitions and investigations had led to nothing. The detectives had found no American crook and no better-class English criminal who could be connected with the crime. That the jewels had vanished with the robbers excited no surprise; it would be months before they began to dribble onto the European market. Inspector Giffen began to be afflicted by a disagreeable fear that Lady Aldington had been robbed by gifted amateurs beyond the reach of narks.

His spurred superiors were demanding results with asperity. But they did not get them. His reputation was not rising. Moreover, if it had not been that he had recognized in Andrew Rawnsley the sixth Marquess of Drysdale, he would have wished that he had not chanced to be at Hammer-smith Police Station on the night of the murder of Henry Rawnsley; for of that crime too he could make nothing. If he had not been there the case would have been put into the hands of some other man; and he was wishing that some other man had it. Nothing had come of the watch on Malkin

Lane—to him at any rate. He was quite sure that the murderer had not escaped to hiding in any of the houses in that thoroughfare. From the most searching inquiries among the criminals of the locality nothing had been learned.

The Inspector had several interviews with Mrs. Rawnsley at Kew; and she bore out her husband's statement that Henry had not an enemy in the world. Yet he could not bring himself to believe that robbery had been the motive of the murder; it would have been so easy for a robber to have snatched at least the boy's watch. He would have been inclined to believe that Henry had been murdered by Andrew Rawnsley himself, had he not had the quite trustworthy evidence of Annie that at the time of the murder Andrew Rawnsley had been sitting quietly in his dining-room. As things were, he was disposed to believe that it might be a crime of revenge, that someone had taken vengeance on Andrew Rawnsley for some crime (he had little doubt that he had committed more crimes than the murder of his wife) of which he had no knowledge and might never have knowledge.

But here he was with two undiscovered crimes on his hands; and it was quite clear to him that, unless his luck turned, he was neither going to discover the despoilers of Lady Aldington nor the murderers of Henry Rawnsley.

Accordingly he was greatly comforted by his rec-

ognition of the sixth Marquess of Drysdale. It gave him more than a mere chance of freshening his fading reputation; if he could bring to justice an English Marquess after a sham suicide and an ingenious ten years evasion, he would not only rise to the very leadership of the detective force, but columns upon columns in the newspapers of the world would be black with his glory.

But he did not under-estimate the difficulties of the task. There was no great difficulty, indeed, in spite of the fact that ten years had elapsed, in working up the evidence that the sixth Marquess of Drysdale had murdered his wife, because his sham suicide and his long concealment from the eyes of his friends in the personality of the proprietor of Rawnsley's Emporium would be damning proofs of his guilt.

The real difficulty was one of identification. He himself had no doubt whatever that Andrew Rawnsley was the sixth Marquess of Drysdale; but his knowledge was to a great degree a matter of pure instinct. Indeed the likeness itself would, during their interviews about the murder of Henry, fade from Andrew Rawnsley's face before his very eyes and return again. Ten years make a great difference in the face of any man.

He had to find other people to swear to the identity of Andrew Rawnsley with the sixth Marquess of Drysdale. There was the difficulty of age. An-

drew Rawnsley looked very much nearer sixty than fifty; but the sixth Marquess of Drysdale would be but a few weeks over fifty. Then there was the beard, which necessarily changed the face. He was sure that, could he get Andrew Rawnsley clean shaven, he would not only take three or four years off his age, but would make it quite plain for all who had known him to recognize in him the sixth Marquess of Drysdale. There was indeed the change in the voice; the rich, deep, almost unctuous tones of Andrew Rawnsley were indeed unlike the harsh, rasping voice of the sixth Marquess of Drysdale; but the voice can be changed, and Inspector Giffen did not propose to trouble his witnesses to the identity with Andrew Rawnsley's voice. The voice so rarely plays a part in the identification, once the prisoner is in the box.

First of all he wanted a *prima facie* case to take to the authorities of Scotland Yard and procure their assistance in the matter. He set about getting it. First of all he dealt with the fact that Andrew Rawnsley had been well known in the neighborhood, first at No. 11 Malkin Lane, then at the house in Cedar Road, Kew, where Mrs. Rawnsley was now living, and then at the House on the Mall, for twenty-two years. He went down to Drysdale and put up at the village inn. He found that he had not to stir out of it to learn anything that was to be learned at Drysdale about the sixth Marquess. In the

landlord of the inn he recognized the butler of Drysdale Court ten years before. The landlord recognized Inspector Giffen and was delighted to learn that he had come down for a couple of days holiday to the scene of his old investigations. He was charmed to be able to discuss the circumstances of the mysterious murder of the Marchioness with one who knew them so well, and to impart to him the four different, but contradictory, solutions of that problem which he had found in the course of pondering it so long. Those set forth at length, there was no difficulty in getting him to talk about his late master. As he had expected, Inspector Giffen learned that for a good ten years before his death the Marquess had been very little at Drysdale Court. He had been used to come to it for a week at Christmas, a week at Easter, a fortnight in the summer, and frequently for week-ends. The Inspector had little difficulty in accounting for the short time the Marquess had spent at his ancestral home; the Marquess had been busy with the Emporium.

He went on to make inquiries about Dr. McGinnis, the doctor who had made the sham suicide possible for the Marquess. He learned, to his considerable annoyance, that Dr. McGinnis had left Drysdale six months after the suicide of the Marquess and betaken himself to the United States. To the inhabitants of Drysdale this had seemed the most natural thing in the world; Dr. McGinnis had been a

failure; he had had few patients and fewer friends. The Inspector made inquiries of those friends about what part of the United States Dr. McGinnis was gracing. None of them could tell him. He was not greatly distressed by this; if the Marquess were brought to trial, *he* would have to produce Dr. McGinnis.

On his return to town the Inspector had another interview with Mrs. Rawnsley about the murder of Henry. He put it to her that the crime might be some act of vengeance, and asked her for particulars of the early life of her husband. As he had expected he learned that Andrew Rawnsley had been vague about his early life. Indeed she could give him no particulars about it; she could only tell him that her husband was a Birmingham man. The Inspector knew that Birmingham was far too large a place for him to hope to demonstrate that Andrew Rawnsley had not lived in it. That did not trouble him: it would rather rest with the Marquess to prove that Andrew Rawnsley had lived in it.

The Inspector had now sufficient of a case to take to his superiors; and the superior he took it to was one of the younger of them, for he felt that a younger man would be most keenly interested in his exciting discovery. He laid before him the fact of his recognition of the sixth Marquess of Drysdale in Andrew Rawnsley. He explained how the sham suicide which had robbed him of his prey at the

very moment at which he had completed the chain of evidence which would have convicted the Marquess of the murder of his wife, had been managed. He showed how the absences of the Marquess from Drysdale Court corresponded with the presence of Andrew Rawnsley at the Emporium. He laid stress on the fact that Mrs. Rawnsley knew nothing about her husband's early life. He ended his exposition on a note of triumph.

As he listened to him the face of his superior, a pallid, heavy-eyed man of thirty-five, grew gloomier and gloomier. Inspector Giffen's point of view that to bring the sixth Marquess of Drysdale to justice after an ingenious evasion of ten years would greatly redound to the credit of the police was not very prominent in his mind. He was thinking rather of the scandal, of the grief and trouble of the Drysdale family, of the ruin of the political career of the Marquess, and of the fact that for the police to have been thrown off the murderer's track by such a simple device as a painted throat would excite more ridicule than their discovery, at the expiration of ten years, that they had been so simply tricked would excite admiration. Then he considered that the genius of detection who had discovered the trick was the very person who had been the victim of it. He began to grow irritated. He began to feel strongly that while zeal was an excellent thing, zeal on the wrong occasion, and too much of it, was

extremely tiresome. At any rate, he would like first to discuss the matter carefully with his colleagues.

His pallid face was a little flushed; his heavy eyes had grown a little bright. He said in his heavy, toneless voice :

"Look here, Giffen; haven't you been in charge of the Aldington case for the last six weeks?"

"Yes, sir," said Inspector Giffen, not seeing clearly what that had to do with it.

"And so far you have discovered nothing, I believe?" said his superior.

"No, sir," said Inspector Giffen.

"Then I think if you were to devote your intelligence to the work which you are supposed to be doing instead of touring the country examining mare's nests, we should get along a little quicker. Good morning."

Inspector Giffen came out of the office in a state of irritation.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WOOING OF NANCY

RUPERT DRAYTON was finding his convalescence the pleasantest time of his life. At half-past two every afternoon Nancy came and entertained him with reading and with talk; for the most part they talked. He had learned, questioning her in his direct, frank, American way, the simple story of her life in the country. Her mother had died when she was a baby of a year old; and her father had died a few months later. Her aunt had taken their place; and she and Nancy had lived a peaceful life of an English village on sixty dollars a month. It had not been a lonely life; as a child, and later as a girl, Nancy had had a full dozen friends, boys and girls, of her own age. With them she had played the games which make country life endurable to the spirited young.

She grew very friendly with Rupert; indeed she was often motherly. But Rupert was dissatisfied; in the matter of friendship, indeed, he was making good progress; but friendship was not what he wanted; it was not enough for him. Yet they never

seemed to get beyond it. He had had no experience in the tender passion; but he felt that there was something wrong in the fact that Nancy's eyes always met his with a serene frankness; never once did they fall before his ardent gaze. He could see that she never for a moment dreamed of the possibility of anything but friendship between them.

He wanted to make her not only dream of it, but think about it seriously; but he was entirely at a loss how to compass that end. His had been the severe, strenuous life. He had not had a college education; girls had played no part in his life. He had not mixed with them since he had always cherished a strong aversion from the social life of his native city, and had despised the male butterflies who flitted about Chicago society.

His father had taken him straight from school into his business. He had felt strongly that if his son were to become a first-class fighter in the business arena, he could not begin his gladiatorial training too early. He had therefore given him an early chance of distinguishing himself in his packing department.

Rupert had not wasted that early chance; he had distinguished himself and earned a speedy promotion to the fancy goods department. Then he had enjoyed a term in every department of the great store; and in none of them had he proved false to his early promise. At the age of twenty-two he

had acquired a thorough, inside knowledge of every branch of the great business; and then his father had promoted him to the rank of his lieutenant. All the time Rupert had been giving his evenings, with every assistance from that keen, indulgent father, to the mastery of the details of the work of the store. It had left him no time for the acquisition of the graces and very little time for reading. His holidays had been short; and he had spent them with a boyhood friend, now a successful young New York lawyer, a strenuous worker like himself, in the Adirondacks or on fishing expeditions in Canada.

His mother, like Nancy's—he felt that it was a bond between them—had died when he was young; and he had no sisters, so that with women he had had little to do. Indeed he had always looked on them with the cold, searching eye of an employer. Every now and then he had gone, or rather he had been dragged, to the social functions of the best circles of Chicago. His father had never encouraged it; and he himself had felt that at them he was a fish out of water. The triviality of the life oppressed him; and he had realized with very little dissatisfaction that he made but a poor show in the necessary conversations with the society women who fluttered about that glittering sphere.

He wished now that he had put a constraint on himself and made a better use of those opportuni-

ties. He wished that he had read more,—that he had read poetry. All the feelings of romance, fine, delicate, and impassioned, were surging in his bosom; and he could not give them expression. When he tried to do so he found himself tongue-tied. He could not talk to Nancy, not, that is, as he felt that he ought to talk to her. He could not tell her how beautiful, how delightful, how ravishing he found her; and there was her face before him, stimulating his romance, a perpetual injunction to him to give it utterance.

Nancy was utterly unaware of the effect her beauty and charm had on him. She was too simple a creature, too unversed in life to realize that her beauty *must* have this effect on him. Several of the brothers of her friends at Alington had, in their bungling way, tried to express their calf-love to her. They had for the most part succeeded in making her laugh and, since none of them had touched her fancy, she had fallen into the way of regarding love as an affliction of the young male. To her Rupert seemed much too old and much too serious to suffer from it.

But necessarily he was under a compulsion to impress his personality upon her; he *had* to talk to her. It was but natural that, since his tongue was sealed to the language of romance proper to her ears, he should talk on his subject, the work he loved. Nancy, like the kind-hearted girl she was,

encouraged him. He was an invalid and must be humored. She let him relate to her, indeed she encouraged him to relate to her, the stories of great deals in hardware, clothing, or fancy goods, and the stories of battles with stern rivals. It is to be feared that, with a lover's partiality to himself, Rupert did not always tell her the truth; out of those great deals and battles he always came the victor. It was wrong perhaps, but it was natural.

Certainly it did but little harm. Nancy's attention so often wandered from the story of the fight before the victory was won. Whenever he paused she smiled upon him graciously and cheered him to continue. But as often as not she was pondering some saying of the Marquess which had puzzled her, or with an even greater interest she was pondering the Marquess himself. He filled her mind more and more. There were caressing glances of his brown eyes, caressing tones of his flexible, haunting voice which clung to her mind. She pondered them, and again she pondered them.

There is no saying what might have happened had she been thrown with Rupert before she met the Marquess, before this prepossession with him filled her mind. She might have listened to Rupert with closer attention and been impressed by his strength. She might have led him on to the expression of the delicate and impassioned feelings she inspired into him.

She had no sentimental feelings about the Marquess; she knew that he could be nothing more than a friend to her. Once or twice, letting herself dream, she had seen him in the part of the fairy prince. She had banished the dream with swift severity; the Marquess was going to marry the most beautiful woman in Europe. But that need not prevent her from taking great interest in him as a friend; he was the most interesting man she had ever met, much more interesting indeed than any of the men in the novels she read. It is significant, that, though Rupert's stories passed lightly and swiftly in at one ear and out at the other, on the rare occasions when they obtained any entrance into her head at all, the political battles of the Marquess, which now and again he described to her with an irony and humor which amused her, excited her liveliest interest. She felt that it was odd that a girl should take an interest in such serious things, and she told herself that it was not owing to the fact that they concerned the Marquess but to the way the Marquess told them. She would not admit that everything which concerned the Marquess was of great interest to her. She felt that that would have been to go too far.

It is not to be wondered at that Rupert believed that he was making great way with her; her kindly display of interest in matters of such absorbing interest to him naturally gave him hope. He came to

feel strongly that a girl who could take this interest in business was the very wife for him.

His convalescence was further lightened by the visits of Andrew Rawnsley who came up to his room for half an hour every morning after breakfast and discussed with him business problems and business methods. Often he would leave Rupert one of the problems of the Emporium to solve for him, and come after dinner in the evening for Rupert's suggestions. Rupert found that the solving interfered somewhat with his dreams of Nancy; but he enjoyed the intellectual wrestle.

The Marquess, who had of course learned from Nancy how she was now spending the early part of her afternoons, took a great interest in Rupert. He showed it chiefly by talking to her of the different methods he himself ought to employ to discover the most beautiful woman in Europe, till Nancy was sick to death of the very mention of that elusive creature.

One afternoon she came from her sick-bed ministrations to find the Marquess sitting with her uncle, waiting for her to come and give them tea. His inquiries about Rupert's progress were almost tender. Since he knew something of the strenuous life of the young American business man, he had extolled to her the sterling qualities which Rupert must possess; and to-day he extolled them once more.

Nancy, she could not understand why, was an-

noyed by these laudations. On the subject of Rupert she had heard from the Marquess so much about sterling qualities that she was beginning rather to dislike them. She had an odd, inexplicable feeling that she would much rather that the Marquess dwelt for a while on the sterling qualities of the young English nobleman. She could not have given the reason for it, but this warm praise of another young man, excellent though that young man might be, seemed in some curious fashion to cast a reflection on her own powers of attraction. It may be that the Marquess, who had acquired, doubtless in the House of Lords, a not inconsiderable knowledge of the heart of women, was aware that his disinterested praise would produce in her some such feeling.

After tea the Marquess protested earnestly that he needed fresh air. They went into the garden of the House on the Mall, and walking up the nearer side of the shrubbery of *Wellingtonias* without coming into sight of the windows of the house, they sat down on a bench near the end of it. They were in a niche in the scented cedar wall.

Nancy observed that the Marquess seemed disinclined to talk, and was looking as solemn, not to say as gloomy, as only he, or a well-trained mute, could.

Presently he sighed heavily and murmured in a low despondent tone: "The most beautiful woman in Europe."

Nancy ground her teeth gently. It seemed rather hard that after Rupert had talked to her for an hour about a desperate deal, the Marquess should begin on the most beautiful woman in Europe.

"What about her—to-day?" she said, in a tone as near gruff as her delightful voice could utter.

"To-day? Why, to-day the difficulty of finding her seems to have grown more appalling than ever," said the Marquess, in a tone of infinite sadness.

"You said that yesterday—and the day before yesterday—and the day before that," said Nancy.

"Did I?" said the Marquess, in a tone of some surprise. "Now I come to think of it I expect I did. She haunts me. And I find you so sympathetic to discuss her with."

"Do you?" said Nancy in anything but a sympathetic tone.

"Yes. And if you come to think of it, she is an attractive and wonderful theme—wonderful—the most beautiful woman in Europe," said the Marquess, in the tone of an almost lachrymose dreamer.

Again Nancy ground her teeth gently. She did not appear to be thinking of anything attractive and wonderful at all. Indeed she was frowning.

The brown eyes of the Marquess rested on her face with ineffable solemnity; and he said: "We are indeed fortunate to have two such subjects of conversation—the most beautiful woman in Europe and

that sterling young American. She appeals especially to me, and he appeals especially to you."

Nancy let her hands fall in her lap in a gesture of discouragement. She turned and gazed at the Marquess with burning eyes, and said a little breathlessly: "And now—and now let's talk about something else."

The Marquess dropped back against the back of the bench; his solemnity broke, and he laughed his ringing, joyous laugh.

"It's a shame to tease you—a horrid shame," he said.

"Tease me?" said Nancy, looking at him with astonished eyes.

With an absent-minded air the Marquess put his arm round her and very nearly kissed her.

Not quite. Nancy may have been at a loss to know what you did when a Marquess invited himself to tea, but she knew very well what you did when a Marquess tried to kiss you. She slapped him hard.

The Marquess gasped, and howled in tones of horror: "She has slapped the senior unmarried Marquess of England, the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs!"

"And she'll do it again!" said Nancy with spirit.

CHAPTER XXII

INSPECTOR GIFFEN EXPLORES THE HOUSE ON THE MALL

THE irritation of Inspector Giffen was some time subsiding. He did not immediately betake himself to his work on the solution of the Aldington jewel mystery, because there was no work to be done on it. The matter persisted, in the most painful manner, in remaining a mystery. Not a ray of light gleamed on it from any quarter.

He spent the next few days prowling about Hammersmith, chiefly about the lower quarters of it; and in different public-houses he discussed the murder on the Mall with many of the most prominent local criminals. He threatened, or endeavored to bribe them by turns. To try to bribe them seemed indeed of little use, since Andrew Rawnsley was offering a thousand pounds reward for information which should lead to the arrest of the murderer; the threats seemed equally useless.

The papers, having other things to attend to, had allowed the matter of the Aldington jewels to sink to two-inch paragraphs. But the offer of so large a

reward still kept the murder of Henry Rawnsley among the quarter-column items. It being necessary to say something in those quarter-column items, a great many of the papers said things about the police—none of them complimentary. Inspector Giffen did not come to his morning paper with his usual avidity. It was a long while since any paper had spoken of his powers of detection with the warmth he knew that they deserved.

It was but natural that his mind should run continually on his discovery that the sixth Marquess of Drysdale was acting as the proprietor of Rawnsley's Emporium. The idea had indeed occurred to him that Andrew Rawnsley might be merely a half-brother of the sixth Marquess, bearing a strong resemblance to him. He had heard of such half-brothers and such resemblances. He put the idea firmly aside; it did not harmonize with his intention of freshening his fading reputation by an astounding discovery. Moreover he was exceedingly eager to demonstrate to his pallid, but peremptory, young superior that the man who supposed that Inspector Giffen was a discoverer of mare's nests was a fool.

His train of bad luck had weakened his usually clear intelligence, and he was deeply absorbed in the fading of his reputation, or he would have perceived the probability that his superiors were disinclined to rake up so old and so terrible a scandal.

He prowled much about the House on the Mall. He would pass it, slowly, five and six times a day. At night he would sometimes stand some thirty or forty yards up or down the Mall, for half an hour at a time, gazing at it. He was not an imaginative man; but sometimes its windows seemed to him to have the appearance of inscrutable eyes. Then one afternoon he saw the *seventh* Marquess of Drysdale go through the big wooden doors which led to the garage of Andrew Rawnsley.

The heart of Inspector Giffen beat so high that for half an hour his face was flushed as if he had been drinking.

It was after that that he began to feel that if only he could get into the house and spend an hour in it alone and undisturbed, he would find evidence so conclusive that he could force his superiors to act. He decided that he would have that undisturbed hour in the House on the Mall.

Long experience had taught him the value of simple methods. He had observed on the afternoon on which he had gone to interview Andrew Rawnsley and had waited in the hall for his return from the Emporium, or from town, that Annie always came up to the front door from the basement of the right wing. There seemed to be no servants in the upper part of the house; he never heard a sound of any. Plainly they did their work earlier in the day. He saw his way to take advantage of this.

At three o'clock the next afternoon he came to the house. Annie let him in and told him that Mr. Rawnsley was out. He said that he would wait till he returned and sat down on the chair in the hall. Annie went through the door into the right wing and shut it behind her. He went quickly to it, gave her time to get half way down the stairs to the basement, opened the door, and called through it: "I shan't be able to wait; I've just remembered an important engagement."

He stepped quickly to the front door, opened it, and closed it loudly. Then he stood listening and heard the girl's footsteps die away down in the basement. He made up his mind to leave the ground floor till the last, for since the servants were in the basement they might hear the sound of his footsteps just over their heads. He went lightly up the stairs to the first floor.

It was enough for him to take one glance at the big drawing-room which covered most of the first floor. He observed that Mr. Rawnsley had not been entertaining ladies lately. It was not only that the furniture was in linen covers, but the room felt as if it had not been used for a long time. He came out of it and hesitated whether to explore the whole of the first floor, or first the centre of the house and then the two wings. He decided that he would explore the whole of the first floor.

There were only four rooms on it beside the

drawing-room, which ran well into wings on both sides. The end of the right wing was filled by a sitting-room looking out over the river, and a bedroom looking out over the garden. The end of the left wing was filled by a similar sitting-room and bedroom. All these four rooms were plainly not in use. He went up to the second floor and there he found the two rooms he wanted, Andrew Rawnsley's bedroom and Andrew Rawnsley's study. They were both in the right wing and both had a southern aspect looking out over the river. The bedroom was luxuriously furnished indeed; in the matter of comfort the art of the upholsterer could go no further. But it was with the toilet-table that Inspector Giffen chiefly concerned himself. It was covered with every implement of the toilet which the most fastidious dandy could possibly need. But no one of them was in any way out of the common or such as he might not have found on the table of any rich dandy in London. He went carefully through the drawers of the toilet table and found in them none of the devices which are used to disguise a man. In one of the hair-brushes he found some black hairs, and saw plainly that either one of the maids or Andrew Rawnsley's valet had been using their master's brushes. He examined the wardrobe with the same care and the same ill success.

Again and again he paused during his examina-

tion to listen. When he came out of the bedroom door he stood still and listened for a good half minute. Then he went into Andrew Rawnsley's study and straight to the big roll-top desk, which stood against the side of the room. He was surprised and pleased to find it open; not a drawer in it was locked. He opened the little drawers in the top of it quickly one after the other and examined their contents. They held nothing of any interest or use to him. His eyes fell on a large, old-fashioned seal; he picked it up and looked at it. *It was engraved with the Drysdale arms.*

He stared at it, smiling with a grim content; then he put it in his pocket.

Cheered by the discovery, he turned again to his search; he wanted, amongst other things, a document in the handwriting of Andrew Rawnsley. He would have been satisfied with a few notes on half a sheet of paper, an unfinished letter, a copy of a letter. He went quickly through the larger drawers on the left-hand side without finding any such document. He opened the top drawer on the right-hand side and ready to the hand of anyone sitting at the desk lay a large-sized, ugly-looking magazine pistol.

Inspector Giffen gazed at it earnestly; and again the grim smile of content wreathed his lips. Andrew Rawnsley was not entirely free from fears.

The Inspector went carefully through the right-

hand drawers and once more he failed to find the scrap of handwriting he wanted. Did Andrew Rawnsley never put a pen to paper except to sign his name?

Inspector Giffen came out of the study, not entirely ill content; he had not found the specimen of handwriting, but he had the seal. He paused outside the door, and then went up the staircase to the third floor. He might as well make a thorough job of it and take a look through the rest of the house. The iron gate at the entrance of the corridor to the left wing caught his eye. He looked at it and saw that it was in constant use. The steel of the catch was bright. It was curious; and he went down the corridor and opened the door of the first room on the left. It was a sitting-room; and he perceived at once that it was in use; it was filled with the fragrance of a lately smoked cigar. His eyes fell straightway on the statue in the niche in the wall facing him. He stared at it; then he crossed the room, stared at it more closely, and recognized the stolen Hebe. The case of the stolen Hebe had been one of his failures. He chuckled softly and slapped his thigh. Now, at any rate, he could force his superiors to act.

He came out of the room, smiling, went along the corridor to the next door, opened it softly, and stood gaping on the threshold. The sixth Marquess of Drysdale, black-haired and clean-shaven, sat

reading by the window. He turned his head, looked at the detective, raised his eyebrows, and said in the rasping tone Inspector Giffen had known so well: "Who the devil are you?"

Inspector Giffen's voice shook a little as he said, triumphantly: "Your lordship has forgotten me. I'm Inspector Giffen."

"Inspector Giffen!" cried the Marquess, loudly. "And what are you doing here?"

"I've been looking for your lordship," said Inspector Giffen.

"And what have you been looking for me for?" cried the Marquess, still more loudly.

"I'm afraid I must ask your lordship to come along with me to Scotland Yard," said Inspector Giffen, suavely.

"To Scotland Yard? What for?" cried the Marquess.

"To explain——"

Inspector Giffen got no further. His right wrist was seized in a powerful grip, and twisted round violently. As he bent backwards to the twisting he saw above him the silky white hair and venerable beard of Andrew Rawnsley.

"Police! Murder!" he bellowed with all the force of his lungs.

Then the Marquess kicked his legs from under him, Andrew Rawnsley flung him on to his face with a jerk which nearly wrenched his arm out of

its socket, and dropped heavily on him with both knees, driving all the breath out of his body.

Before he got it back a handkerchief had been thrust into his mouth; his hands had been tied behind him; and his ankles had been bound together.

He could only see the carpet; but he heard the Marquess of Drysdale say, with his rasping voice: "Very neat."

"Not bad for a man of my age," said the deep, rich voice of Andrew Rawnsley.

Had Inspector Giffen been able to see, he would have seen that to speak the two sentences the lips of only one man moved; and those were the lips of Paul Mauleverer, the sixth Marquess of Drysdale. . . .

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF INSPECTOR GIFFEN

BETTER get another handkerchief," said the voice of the Marquess.

Inspector Giffen heard the footsteps of Andrew Rawnsley go down the passage and return again. Then one of them blindfolded him. His feet were unbound; and they raised him on to them. Both of his captors grasped him by an arm and marched him across the passage. A door was snapped to; and he found himself in a lift, descending. He could not count how many stories it went down; but when the door was opened and he was led out of it he gathered from the damp feeling of the air and from the fact that he was walking along a stone or a cement floor, that he was in the basement. He counted twenty-five paces from the lift; then they stopped, and to his surprise he found himself standing still but moving round. They took three steps forward, and the voice of Andrew Rawnsley said, "Mind the steps."

They went down a flight of steps, turned to the left, walked forty-two paces and stopped. To his

surprise, one of his captors cut quickly through the bonds which bound his hands behind him. Before he could make any use of them he received a sudden push, and he stepped on to nothing, and fell through the floor. By great good luck, in spite of the unexpectedness of the fall, he fell on his hands and knees, and only bruised his left knee on the stone floor on which he fell.

"Now bellow," said the voice of the Marquess above him, and he laughed a harsh, rasping laugh.

Inspector Giffen did not bellow, because the handkerchief was still in his mouth. He tore off the handkerchief from his eyes. Three feet above him was a square opening in the ceiling. The ray of an electric lamp fell upon him from above; and the voice of Andrew Rawnsley said, "He's not crippled."

Then Inspector Giffen saw a stone slab come down and close the opening.

He pulled the handkerchief out of his mouth and shouted a curse at the Sixth Marquess of Drysdale. Then, in utter darkness, he groped round the walls of his prison. It did not take him long; it was no more than ten feet square. He ran against a low bed in groping round it, and in the further wall was a curious groove about fifteen inches deep and fifteen inches across. He could not conceive the object of it. He sat down on the bed and pondered his unpleasant plight.

The more he pondered it the more unpleasant did it seem to him. He was in a perfect *oubliette*, and in the power of a desperate man, whose dangerous secret he had surprised. He wondered whether he would ever see his wife and little boy again.

Then he fell to considering the circumstances of his capture. So Andrew Rawnsley had, after all, been the half-brother of the Sixth Marquess of Drysdale. It was in his house that the Marquess lay hidden. He might have been there for years, but Inspector Giffen thought it more likely that he had lived abroad most of the time, and only used the House on the Mall during his stays in England. Doubtless, too, the Marquess had found the money with which Andrew Rawnsley had founded the Emporium. The remarkable thing was that this half-brother's likeness to him should have put him on the track of the Marquess. It looked to him as if his luck were turning. But no; by the time he got out of this prison, if he ever did get out of it, the Marquess would be hidden in some foreign country, hidden probably, beyond finding, in a home he had established ten years before.

He sat still for a long while, thinking the matter out; then once more he groped round his cell, feeling the walls and the floor. Everywhere his fingers rested on smooth, hard cement. There was nothing to be done; and he sat down on the bed again; then he lay down on it. Now and again he

marked the passage of time by feeling the hands of his watch; the hours passed very slowly. He perceived more and more clearly that he was in the hole of a lifetime.

At about eight o'clock that night he heard a sound—the only sound he had heard since the stone slab had come down over the opening in the ceiling. It came from the groove in the wall at the end of his prison. It was a faintly grating sound. He sprang from his bed and rushed to the groove, and four feet from the ground his hand touched a shelf which filled the groove. It felt to be of iron. On the shelf he felt a loaf of bread, then a jug of water, and then a candle in a candlestick. On the instant he found the matches in the candlestick and struck one and lighted the candle. Sure enough there was a loaf of bread and a jug of water. Also beside the candle in the candlestick were three other candles, and the candlestick stood on a book. He put the candle and the bread and the spare candles on the bed, the jug of water he put on the floor. Then he took the book from the shelf and read the title. It was called "Wonderful Escapes."

He felt somewhat comforted. Plainly his captors did not intend to starve him. It looked also as if they did not intend to murder him. If they had, they would hardly have taken the trouble to feed him. He ate half the loaf and drank half the water out of the jug—it was all there was to drink

it out of. Then he went to bed. He would postpone the reading of the book till the morrow. Having some knowledge of the character of the Sixth Marquess of Drysdale, he doubted that he would find in it much information of use to him.

* * * * *

When the trap had closed the opening of Inspector Giffen's prison, Paul Mauleverer said thoughtfully, "I think that the proper place for Andrew Rawnsley is his office in the Emporium. There is nothing like an alibi."

He led the way to the little chamber at the foot of the steps leading up to the circular cellar, and from one of the shelves in the wall of it he took a tin case and opened it. From it he drew a wig of white, silky hair, with a venerable beard attached to it, and adjusted it to his head with the aid of a mirror in the lid of the tin case. The fit was a marvel; and two Andrew Rawnsleys faced one another in the little chamber.

"The likeness is not good, Pettigrew," said Paul Mauleverer, "but, with my double voice, I think it served."

"Yes, sir," said Pettigrew respectfully.

Pettigrew went up into the circular cellar, from it to the lift, and so to the top of the left wing. He went to his bedroom, took off the Andrew Rawnsley wig and beard, and put them carefully

away in a tin case, the fellow of the tin case in the little chamber at the foot of the steps leading up to the circular cellar.

Paul Mauleverer went in the opposite direction, down the passage facing the cellar steps. It led under the garden. He walked down it rather more than sixty yards, and came to a blank wall. A spring set it revolving on a pivot in the same fashion as the cellar wall of No. 11 Malkin Lane. He stepped through the opening into a lift, shut the revolving door, pressed a spring, and rose. When the lift stopped, he pressed another spring, and a wooden door in the panelled wall of his office opened and let him through.

He closed the panel and then unlocked the door of his office, for he had locked it before going by the secret way to the House on the Mall for an hour's quiet reading, walked through his outer office into the office full of clerks, went down the stairs, out of the building, and round through Malkin Lane to the House on the Mall. A dozen clerks could have gone into the witness box and sworn that Andrew Rawnsley had entered his office at half-past two that afternoon and left it at half-past four. The only access to it was through the room in which they worked.

It was not till the following evening that the newspaper placards announced the mysterious disappearance of Inspector Giffen.

That evening Paul Mauleverer spent an hour with Colonel Webling at his flat in Holland Park Avenue. They talked at length about the villages of Wicksey and Tilcombe on the coast of Essex. Colonel Webling knew the district well. He had spent a month there, shooting duck, the year before. He dwelt at length on the desolation of that sparsely-populated patch of coast and on the advantages afforded by the sand dunes to a man in ambush. They were both of them cheerful.

But when Paul Mauleverer rose to go, the Colonel's face grew suddenly hard and stern. At the door of the flat, when Paul Mauleverer said good night to him, he said:

"By the way, don't come here while I'm away."

"Whatever should I come here *for* when you're away?" said Paul Mauleverer in a tone of surprise.

"You know very well what you'd come here for. Don't," said Colonel Webling in tones of dangerous menace.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MONTAGUE BURGE

THE next morning Andrew Rawnsley came to his office rather earlier than usual, and at once sent for Montague Burge. When he came he greeted his employer sulkily, but somewhat less sulkily than he had greeted him for some time past. Colonel Webling had been unable to get him an interview with the Chief, and he was beginning to understand once more that Andrew Rawnsley was the side on which his bread was buttered.

There was no change whatever in the demeanor of Andrew Rawnsley; he turned to Montague Burge with a scowl, and said to him in a tone which he would hardly have cared to use to a well-bred dog:

"The Chief has been at work trying to get hold of the jewels which were stolen from Welgrave Grange, and he thinks he has done it. But the gang who got them are, he says, a very shifty lot, and it's more than likely that they'll try to palm off inferior stuff on us if we don't look out, so you had better go and get them yourself."

"Where do I go to?" said Montague Burge with no display of eagerness.

"Here's a letter from the man the Chief is dealing with," said Andrew Rawnsley. And he handed it to Montague Burge.

It was a short letter, typed with a broken-down machine, full of letters out of their alignment, written on the paper of the Crown Hotel, Biggleswade. It ran:

DEAR SIR—My man will meet you with the great Auk's egg at the Anchor Inn, Tilcombe, on Thursday, Friday or Saturday evening, he cannot be sure which. The best way to get to Tilcombe is to take the train to Swyre and drive through Fleetham Regis.

Yours truly,
HAROLD WALTERS.

Montague Burge read the letter through twice, frowning, then he said in a grumbling tone, though the prospect of heavy profit from the jewels pleased him well, "It seems to be a three days' job, and not by any means a certainty at that."

"The Chief is fairly sure that it will be all right," said Andrew Rawnsley. "But it's quite clear that an expert has got to go."

"Oh, I suppose I must go," said Montague Burge in a grumbling tone. "But if you ask me, I say it's a wild-goose chase."

"I don't ask you," said Andrew Rawnsley coldly.

"What about the money for the jewels? Am I to take it with me?" growled Burge.

"No. The Chief pays over the money—probably to this fellow Walters."

On the Thursday morning Montague Burge started for Tilcombe. He wore a light tweed suit appropriate to the June of legend, but quite inappropriate to the gray sky and drizzling rain through which the train made its slow way to the coast of Essex. At the end of two and a half hours he reached Swyre. The rain had ceased to drizzle, it was now heavy and steady. He did not relish any drive through it, and when he learned that the drive to Tilcombe was eight miles long, he relished it still less. However, there was nothing for it. He hired a trap, an open trap because Swyre did not boast a single country, musty fly, and set out.

They drove along a road by the sea. It was a bad road all the way, but those parts of it which seemed to have spent part of the winter under water were worse. The country was flat, and the road ran through sand dunes, very desolate. Four miles from Swyre they came to the village of Fleetham Regis and there, at the Heron Inn, they stopped and drank. Then they pursued their way through the same rain and the same sand dunes to Tilcombe.

At Tilcombe Montague Burge found that the chief inn was the Plough; the Anchor was further

on along the coast. Montague Burge could not conceive how a village of a dozen cottages could support two inns.

A low, whitewashed, thatched, two-story building, the Anchor, stood by itself a mile from Tilcombe, which lay to the south of it, and several miles from anywhere to the north. His knowledge of the history of his country, acquired at a commercial academy, was too slight to inform him that it was quite plainly a relic of the great smuggling industry, by which the ancestors of the inhabitants of Tilcombe had so richly lived. It boasted a scrubby, wind-blasted flower garden in the front of it, more garden, a cow-house, and pig-sties behind it. A cow, a calf, a heifer, and two steers, all very lean, all of them peering through the gate of the yard, as if it was there they looked to find their food, showed that the publican followed also the profession of grazier. Before he got out of the trap Montague Burge anathematized it as the most God-forsaken place he had ever set eyes on.

The landlord, apprised by his letter of the coming of Montague Burge, was standing on the threshold to welcome him. He was a dull-looking, weather-beaten, lean man, who looked more like a half-starved fisherman than a licensed victualler. Two little shock-headed girls peered at the newcomer round their father's legs.

Montague Burge descended from the trap and

paid the driver. The landlord carried his portmantau into the inn, came back, peered earnestly into the back of the trap, and asked where the gentleman's gun-case was. Montague Burge said with some curtness that he had come for his health, not for shooting. He went gloomily into the inn and found that the rooms downstairs were a tap-room and a kitchen. There was no fire in the tap-room; and in the kitchen there was not only a fire but children. He ordered a fire to be lighted in the tap-room, and while the landlord's wife was lighting it, he went into the kitchen to get the June chill out of his bones. The children stared at Montague Burge; Montague Burge stared gloomily at the fire.

But when he came to go into the matter he found that the inn was not so bad as it looked. It seemed that the landlord, or rather his wife, was used to providing for gentlemen. Ascetic young fellows were in the habit of coming down in the autumn, winter, and early spring to shoot duck in the marshes, which began half a mile inland from the inn. There was a basket chair, which was not uncomfortable, in the tap-room, and when the fire had burned up, Montague Burge settled himself in it to await the coming of the friend of Mr. Harold Walters. For his dinner, or, as the landlord called it, his supper, Montague Burge had a dish of eggs and bacon. The bacon was local and green, but after his drive through the nipping June air his ap-

petite was good, and he enjoyed it far more than he would have enjoyed a much better meal in London. Fortunately, distrusting the whisky of the country, he had put a couple of bottles of his own into his portmanteau. It improved his meal and his spirits; he looked to it to cheer the hours till the coming of the friend of Mr. Harold Walters.

At half-past seven three fishermen came to the inn and talked slowly with many pauses to one another and the landlord over their pots of beer. Montague Burge smoking a cigar in front of the fire paid but little heed to their talk of crops and the sea; but his business instinct caused him to observe that the three of them together spent sixpence on beer in the course of the evening. Montague Burge fell into a light doze and came out of it with a jerk. As he awoke he had the faintest and most fleeting vision of a face looking out of the darkness at him through the uncurtained window. He fancied (it was no more than a fancy, so brief had the vision been) that it was the face of Colonel Webling.

He sat bolt upright, staring at the window, bewildered. It could not be the face of Colonel Webling. He was in London. What should he be doing here, at this end of the world, on a dark and rainy night? Of course it was not Colonel Webling. But he was uncomfortable. If it should have been Colonel Webling?

He rose and went up the narrow, awkward stairs to his low bedroom, pondering. He got to bed; but the June chill had got into the room, the bed was cold, and he was long getting to sleep. The thought of Colonel Webling at Tilcombe haunted him, troubled him. Suppose that the Chief had taken his suggestion of getting rid of Andrew Rawnsley in bad part; suppose he had told Andrew Rawnsley—his employer would make no bones about getting rid of him.

Once he got shivering out of bed, looked carefully to the bolt of the door, took the revolver he had brought with him from his portmanteau, and put it under his pillow. Then another idea occurred to him, why should not Colonel Webling be the friend of Mr. Harold Walters, bringing the Welgrave jewels? It might easily be that Colonel Webling was also a member of the gang which had stolen the jewels. Webling must have been surprised at finding Montague Burge waiting to receive them. Possibly he would go back to town, and another of the gang would bring them. But no. Webling would bring them to-morrow night. Much cheered by this view of the matter he fell asleep.

He awoke next morning to find the sun shining and the sea still and very blue. He came down to his breakfast in very good spirits. His vision of the face of Colonel Webling at the window had

been a nonsensical fancy. He had been but half awake and was still dreaming. He ate bacon and eggs with great gusto. After breakfast he lighted his cigar and was but faintly annoyed to learn that there would be no newspaper at Tilcombe before half-past one. The day was so fine and fresh and warm that he had little desire to read what was happening in cities. He fetched his walking stick from his bedroom; he did not bother to take the revolver with him in the daytime, and set out for a walk. He had gone nearly a hundred yards when he heard a shouting behind him. He looked round and saw the landlord standing in front of the inn, waving his arm.

The landlord put his hand to his mouth and shouted something about the sands. Montague Burge thought that it sounded like "Mind the sands." The landlord shouted again and Montague Burge caught the word "Quicksands." Since he did not propose to go down to the sands there was no need for him to mind them. He waved his stick and went briskly on, skirting the sea, among the sand dunes. The road proper ended at the Anchor, and he was walking along a rude track, turfed with sparse, wiry grass. He walked briskly for rather more than half an hour, then he stopped, took out his handkerchief, and wiped his brow. The sun was uncommonly warm for June. He sat down on the top of a low dune and lighted a cigar. It was then

that the loneliness of the place suddenly struck him. He had never been in such a lonely place in his life. A little chill ran down his back, the chill that tells you that some one is walking over your grave. Suppose that Colonel Webling *should* be at Tilcombe. Suddenly he remembered with extraordinary vividness the face of Colonel Webling when he had said that he would knock Crinkly Billson on the head for three hundred pounds. He rose quickly and looked fearfully round the sand dunes. He wished he had brought his revolver with him. Then over the top of a sand dune forty yards away he saw a curious object. It was odd, yet it was familiar, a dark-green object about three inches high and seven or eight inches long. *It was the top of a Homburg hat!*

His heart leaped into his mouth. He had once seen Colonel Webling wearing a green Homburg hat.

He stood quite still, scarcely daring to breathe. The thoughts raced through his mind, confused, hurrying. The wearer of the Homburg hat was between him and the Anchor Inn. He stood for five minutes quite still, not knowing what to do. The wearer of the Homburg hat never stirred. He was waiting—waiting ten yards from the path.

Montague Burge's wits began to clear. Colonel Webling was waiting to spring upon him as he re-

turned. Why indeed should he not be waiting to shoot him? The sudden wail of a swooping gull above his head made him start, his knees knocked together and his teeth chattered. He could not keep his jaws still. He was gazing out to sea sideways. The top of the hat was just in the corner of his eye. Suddenly it had gone.

Montague Burge came down the side of the dune at a little run, then he set out briskly along the path, still away from Tilcombe. He knew that there was a village, Wicksey, five miles along the coast. The landlord had told him so. It could not now be more than three miles away. He must get to it. He could travel faster than Colonel Webling. He was going straight. Colonel Webling must zig-zag among the dunes. He walked fast, but not too fast; his pursuer must not guess that he knew that he was being hunted.

A mile further on he came round a dune to find that the shore became a hundred yards of swamp, through the middle of which a stream ran out to sea. At the sight a sob broke from him. He stood still, gazing wildly round, panic-stricken indeed. Then his wits cleared. He had a chance—the open sand. He must get past Webling in the open and run for it. He was five years younger than Webling.

He turned and went down to the sand. There was a stretch of some seventy yards of it between

the sea and the dunes. He did not go quickly; he wished to appear at his ease. He took a slanting course toward the water, turned back toward Tilcombe. He had not gone forty yards when Colonel Webling came out of the dunes fifty yards higher up. The sunlight glimmered on the revolver in his hand. To Montague Burge that glimmer was brighter than all the sunlight on the sea.

He started to run. Colonel Webling came toward him at a gentle trot, cutting him off. Montague Burge swerved toward the water and ran his hardest. Colonel Webling trotted twenty yards down the sand and stood still. He knew the district. Suddenly Montague Burge found the sand heavy, clogging his feet. He plunged on; in another stride it was above his ankles—sucking. With a terrific effort he tore himself free and made another plunge toward the sea. He sank above his knees. He twisted round toward the shore and tried to drag himself back to the firmer sand; but the sand sucked at him. In three seconds it was halfway up his thighs; then he understood the shout of the landlord—quicksand!

He struggled. He tried to throw himself forward and float on its treacherous surface, but the sand sucked and sucked.

It was above his waist. He began to howl like a lost dog—the sand sucked. It was up to his armpits. His howls were long-drawn, monotonous.

Altogether there were eight of them. Then the sand covered his mouth. In less than twenty seconds only his hat was above the sand. It stayed there—floating.

CHAPTER XXV

A DISCUSSION

THE Marquess rubbed his cheek and stared solemnly at Nancy. Nancy had no difficulty in meeting his steady gaze, for she was very angry.

"You don't realize what you've done," said the Marquess.

"Yes, I do!" said Nancy with intense conviction.

"You can't. You can't realize what horrors of remorse you will feel when I am Prime Minister of England and you remember that you slapped me."

"I shan't feel any remorse at all!" said Nancy, with even more intense conviction.

"Wait—wait till that time comes," said the Marquess in a pained tone. "You don't know what a difference it will make in your feelings when I am actually Prime Minister."

"It won't make any difference at all," said Nancy.

"This hardness is perverse indeed," said the Marquess very gloomily. "To think that one so young, and apparently so beautiful, should go about the world striking members of His Majesty's Government."

"I don't," said Nancy. "I've never had to strike any one before—you know I haven't."

"Can the race of man be indeed so blind?" said the Marquess in a tone of the greatest surprise. "Now, I can never see you without wanting to kiss you."

"You've no business to talk to me like that," said Nancy with great dignity.

"But I have," said the Marquess. "Out of politics my motto is, 'The truth at all costs.' Besides, it's only natural. I'm your friend, aren't I?"

"What's that got to do with kissing?" said Nancy.

"But you kiss your other friends—that girl at Alington now you told me about—you used to kiss her. Why shouldn't you kiss me?"

"Don't talk nonsense," said Nancy with cold dignity.

"I'm not talking nonsense," said the Marquess firmly. "As a politician pledged to support a Bill for the Enfranchisement of Women—unless I am called away on sudden business—I do not believe in these sex disabilities. If you kiss a girl friend you ought to kiss a man friend. It's obvious."

Nancy scorned to answer him. She gazed at him sideways contemptuously. The Marquess gazed at her solemnly. It was undignified, but it became a staring match, and the Marquess won.

"Well now?" he said in a very patient tone.

"Now what?" said Nancy impatiently.

"That kiss—now that I've explained things," said the Marquess.

Nancy rose hastily and removed herself swiftly to the distance of three paces.

"You've no business to talk to me like this," she said.

On her words Andrew Rawnsley came round the end of the shrubbery, a cigar in his mouth, his hands behind his back, his head bare, and his silky white hair a little ruffled by the light June breeze. Had it not been for the cigar, which is somehow preventive of true reverence, he would have looked the most venerable man in England. He stopped short, and his keen eyes scanned the faces of Nancy and the Marquess. Nancy was flushed, and her eyes were sparkling very brightly. The Marquess was only flushed on one cheek, and the flush was curiously, but very distinctly, shaped like the palm of a hand and four fingers.

The Marquess rose, and said carelessly, "Ah, Rawnsley, I was looking for you."

"Evidently: and you found Miss Weston. The young have all the luck," said Andrew Rawnsley dryly.

"Yes; I paused—I paused—to—er—instruct Miss Weston in the—er—proper attitude of the subjects of our Sovereign toward future Prime Ministers."

"Yes; I see. You instructed Miss Weston in this

duty, and she did it," said Andrew Rawnsley, and he looked at the single flushed cheek of the Marquess in a very pointed fashion.

"No—no—she hadn't done it exactly," said the Marquess with thoughtful slowness. "We had only just come to the end of my—er—discourse. She was just going to do it."

"Oh! I wasn't!" cried Nancy.

"I expect Miss Weston would take a good deal of instructing. Well, you'll find me in the house since you want me," said Andrew Rawnsley, and he turned on his heel and went back round the end of the shrubbery.

"The world is full of people who interrupt," said the Marquess gloomily. "It's full of them. Just at the very moment that you were going to give me——"

"I wasn't!" cried Nancy, and her eyes blazed at him. "You know I wasn't! I think you're horrid—detestable—to make Mr. Rawnsley think that!"

"But why not? Now that I've made things so clear," said the Marquess in a tone of pained surprise.

Nancy ground her teeth. She said in a low, rather thick tone of extreme exasperation, "Oh, go and talk to the most beautiful woman in Europe!"

She turned and walked quickly down the path. The Marquess did not follow her. He stood quite still gazing after her, then his face broke into his delightful smile.

CHAPTER XXVI

CRINKLY BILLSON LEARNS THE SECRET OF THE CIRCULAR CELLAR

AT half-past twelve on the Friday, Andrew Rawnsley was sitting in his office in the Emporium. He had just finished signing a batch of letters which Nancy had typed; and he took out his cigarette case and lighted a cigarette. There came a knock at the door and a clerk came in bringing a telegram. Andrew Rawnsley took it from him and opened it. It ran:

“No keys ottoman.”

Andrew Rawnsley stared at it, frowning, for more than a minute. The clerk stood still, waiting to hear if there were any answer.

Andrew Rawnsley looked up at him, and said: “There’s no answer. Will you tell Mr. Hargreave to send all the ledgers of the Jewelry Department round to Mr. Burge’s house in Ravenscourt Avenue. Telephone to my house and tell them to send round my car.”

The clerk went; and Andrew Rawnsley sat still, frowning in deep thought.

Presently he took from his drawer two telegraph forms, and rising, said: "I want to use your machine a minute, Miss Weston."

Nancy rose from her chair; and he sat down in it. The first telegram he addressed to Crinkly Billson. It ran:

"Trouble. Meet brown motor car Hammersmith end Hammersmith Bridge eleven to-night."

The second telegram he addressed to Montague Burge's housekeeper. It ran:

"Meet nine-thirty train at Liverpool Street to-night. Bring evening dress and suit-case. Wait. Burge."

He counted the words in the telegrams, put stamps on them, and put them into his pocket. He took his shiny top hat from its peg, told Nancy that she could go, and went through the office, down the stairs, and out of one of the front doors of the Emporium. As he came out of it his car was drawing up to the curb. Andrew Rawnsley's servants did not waste time.

He bade his chauffeur drive him to Richmond and round the Park. On the outskirts of Richmond Town he stopped the car at a pillar-box and posted the telegram to Crinkly Billson. On the top of Richmond Hill he stopped the car again at another pillar-box and posted the telegram to Montague

Burge's housekeeper. Then he drove round the Park and back to the House on the Mall.

After lunch he sent Annie to Herbert Wilson to beg him to come round to him; and in a few minutes he came. Andrew Rawnsley passed the cigars to him, and when he had lighted one said: "About the floor of the circular cellar. How long would it revolve without stopping?"

"It's merely a matter of keeping the ball-bearings lubricated. I should say that it would revolve for months at a moderate speed," said Herbert Wilson.

"I don't want it to revolve at a moderate speed; I want it to revolve fast," said Andrew Rawnsley.

"Well, I'll guarantee it to revolve at two hundred and fifty revolutions a minute for seven days. It's in perfect order, I tried it yesterday. But of course it would want careful watching all the time."

"Have you got the power to run it at that rate and the oil to keep it lubricated?" said Andrew Rawnsley.

"Yes, I've got both and to spare."

"Then I can rely on two hundred and fifty revolutions a minute for three days to an absolute certainty."

"Yes," said Herbert Wilson.

"Good," said Andrew Rawnsley. "By the way, how are the Marquess of Drysdale and Nancy getting along?"

"How do you mean?" said Herbert Wilson.

"Well, they're very much in love with one another, aren't they?"

"I don't know. I never thought about it," said Herbert Wilson, in a tone of great surprise.

Andrew Rawnsley laughed: "Well, you'll have that cellar floor ready to start revolving at eleven o'clock to-night," he said.

"Yes, you can rely on it," said Herbert Wilson, rising to go. As he went out of the door he added: "I'm very proud of that cellar floor."

"Why only the cellar floor? All your underground devices are excellent," said Andrew Rawnsley.

At nine o'clock that night Paul Mauleverer was strolling down Ravenscourt Avenue with the most careless air in the world, smoking a cigar. He looked a very pleasant, idle gentleman. It was a cloudy night; and the dusk had fallen early. He turned in through the gate of Montague Burge's garden, went quietly up the steps, and let himself into the house. When, three years before, his agent had let the house to Montague Burge, the sixth Marquess of Drysdale had thought it well to retain one of the latch-keys. There were few things that the sixth Marquess of Drysdale did not think of; but Montague Burge had never thought to change the lock on his front door.

Paul Mauleverer went straight up the stairs

to Montague Burge's study. As he expected, on the top of the roll-top desk stood the three big ledgers of the Jewelry Department of Rawnsley's Emporium. He drew down the blind and drew the thick curtains across the window. Then he took from a case one of those very sharp, short, broad knives which booksellers use, and attacked the ledgers. He worked with extraordinary speed and dexterity. He might have spent all his life cutting pages out of ledgers and crumpling them—never more than two pages together. He threw the crumpled leaves under the desk till the central part was full; then he heaped the others round the desk till it stood three feet deep in crumpled paper. He was half an hour doing it; and though the work was light, at the end of that half hour he was perspiring freely, he worked so swiftly. There were four candles in candlesticks about the room; and in a couple of minutes he had shredded them into flakes all over the pile of paper. He emptied the oil from the reservoir of a brass reading-lamp on to the desk itself. Then he struck a match and lighted the bottom of the pile in two places. He walked quietly to the door, paused, looked at the mounting flame, and smiled.

"So much for the precautions of my faithful manager," he said softly.

He went out of the room, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket. He went out of the house,

and walked quietly up the street. He did not even trouble to look behind him.

Crinkly Billson had been spending an agitated afternoon. The telegram had frightened him. He did not know what the trouble was about. It might be about the Aldington jewels, or the sandbagging of the young man in Malkin Lane; in that case it was not a matter for any great uneasiness. The Chief would see to it. But it might be trouble about the murder of Henry Rawnsley; in that case there was indeed reason to be uneasy. Not only the police but the Chief also were to be feared in that. He spent quite a lot of the afternoon muttering execrations against the tempter, Shore-Wardell, who had exposed him, to so little purpose, to the Chief's enmity.

He was at the end of Hammersmith Bridge at half-past ten and he found the half-hour wait very trying, though he had done his best to brace his courage with abundant whisky. At eleven o'clock, even as the clocks were striking, the brown motor-car came down the bridge. He recognized it; it was the motor-car with the Cape hood in which Montague Burge had brought them back from Chipperfield Common. He saw the driver's white beard and thought that it was Mr. Shore-Wardell. The driver stopped the car with a jerk and beckoned to him. He slipped into the seat by his side. Then he perceived that it was not Mr. Shore-Wardell but

an older and far more benevolent looking gentleman. He inspired confidence.

"I'm glad you were punctual," said the gentleman; and he set the car going again.

Crinkly Billson did not say anything; he waited for the gentleman to speak. But the gentleman said nothing, he drove the car up into King's Street and down the Chiswick High Road, then down Chiswick Lane and back along the Mall. Crinkly Billson swore under his breath when it stopped within twenty feet of the spot where he had murdered Henry Rawnsley. There was nothing to be done, but he held himself ready to make a fight.

The benevolent old gentleman got out of the car and said, "Come along."

Crinkly Billson had thought once or twice that he was driving rather wildly, and now he observed that he crossed the pavement and went up the steps of the house with something of a stagger. Plainly he was not quite sober. It was reassuring. He hesitated; then he followed him with a slightly crouching gait, ready to spring. Andrew Rawnsley opened the door, let the pugilist in, and led the way across the dimly lighted hall and down the corridor to the library. He hiccoughed twice on the way. On a table before the fire stood whisky, syphons, glasses and cigars. He bade the pugilist help himself.

When he had mixed a whisky and soda and lighted a cigar, Andrew Rawnsley said in a rather thick

voice, slurring his words: "The trouble ish about the Aldington jewels, Mr. Billson. The poleesh haven't got wind of you at all, but they may; and the Chief thought you'd better be ready."

"Raight O!" said the pugilist, cheerfully.

He was greatly relieved. To find himself on the Mall within a few yards of the spot where he had murdered Henry Rawnsley, had trebled his uneasiness. It was cheering to hear that it was only the matter of the Aldington jewels which was in question. He drank off his whisky and soda and reached for the decanter.

"Yes; as a matter of fact ther'sh nothing for you to bother about. They're only on the track of the driver of the car, and not very closely on his track. But where the poleesh are concerned, it's always well to be prepared; and it may be better for you to leave the country," said the old gentleman; and he hiccoughed again.

Crinkly Billson drank off half of his second glass of whisky and soda and said: "There's no need to bother about me, gov'ner, I took my precautions, I did. There's a house full of people as can swear that I warn't outer Vauxhall that night. I went ter bed at eleven an' goin' upstairs I rysed 'ell. Then at twelve I comes down in my stockings; an' not a soul 'eard me."

"Good," said Andrew Rawnsley. "But still you might find that the poleesh were after you; and in

that case you're to come to this house and hide till we can get you safely out of England; and I sent for you to show you your hiding-place."

"Raight O!" said the pugilist.

He knew that he would never have any need to fly to the House on the Mall. The police were bound to learn that he had never been out of London on the night of the theft of the Aldington jewels. He was sure of it.

Andrew Rawnsley rose and said: "Come along and I'll show you the hiding-place."

He led the way, staggering a little, out of the room, along the corridor and into the hall. At the front door he paused and said: "When you knock at this door a girl will open it—a pretty girl—don't you stop to make love to her." He chuckled with vinous glee. "You will just say to her, 'London'; and she'll let you in. Now notice carefully the way you go. You don't want to lose your way and be caught by the police wandering about the basement. They might be right on your heels."

He led the way down into the basement and along the passage into the circular cellar at the end of it, switching on the electric light and adjuring Billson to be sure to mark the way as he went. Then he showed him the spring which opened the little panel which disclosed the switches which worked the floor.

"You press the top switch so," he said; and pressed the bottom switch.

The floor moved round and disclosed the steps leading down the underground passages. Andrew Rawnsley led the way down, and switched on the electric light in the little chamber at the bottom. Crinkly Billson opened his eyes and his mouth in amazement. The shelves in the wall of the chamber were loaded with silver plate, gleaming in the light. One of the shelves was heaped with bags.

Andrew Rawnsley struck one of the bags with his fist. It chinked, and he laughed a drunken laugh and said. "Gold—gold. The Chief keeps part of his hoard here."

Crinkly Billson gasped; and his eyes gleamed.

"Now you go down this passage—this one in front—and you'll find a little room at the end, with an armchair and a bed in it—very comfortable. But mind you don't go down any of the other passages. They're not safe, Billson my boy, not safe. Bear it in mind. Well, do you think you'll find your way?"

"Trust me, gov'ner. I shan't miss it," said Crinkly Billson.

Andrew Rawnsley laughed his drunken laugh again, and said: "I'll bet you won't. Come on."

He led the way up the steps into the cellar, switched back the floor to its right position, and went out of the cellar. Crinkly Billson saw that he had forgotten to close the little panel behind which were the switches, and to switch off the light. He did not point out to him these omissions. The pu-

gulist's curious red-brown eyes were gleaming; they looked more red than brown. His hand was behind him, fingering the handle of a life-preserver in his hip pocket.

Andrew Rawnsley, staggering more than ever, as if the cold air of the basement had increased his intoxication, led the way along the passage, up to the stairs, and into the hall. At the front door he paused and said with a chuckle:

"Nobody saw you come in; and nobody will see you go out."

The pugilist bared his teeth.

"But wait a minute—you'd like another drink before you go," said Andrew Rawnsley.

He led the way back to the library. Crinkly Billson kept close on his heels. He was holding the life-preserver in his hand, under his jacket.

Andrew Rawnsley made two steps into the library; the pugilist made one and struck at the white head. Andrew Rawnsley pitched forward on to his face and lay still.

Crinkly Billson shut the door softly and went down the corridor and across the hall with long, swift, noiseless strides. At the top of the stairs of the basement he stopped to listen while you might count a score. He went swiftly down the stairs, along the passage into the circular cellar, shut the door, crossed the cellar, and pressed down the top switch.

There was a click; a sheet of steel shot out from the side of it and closed the opening in the floor. The floor began to revolve. There was another click; and the panel snapped to over the switches. The floor went round. To the pugilist's surprise it did not stop at the head of the steps to the underground passages. It went round and round, faster. He saw that something had gone wrong, and as the floor brought him round to it, he seized the handle of the door. *The handle came off in his hand.*

The floor went faster. Presently he found it hard to keep his footing; and the floor went faster still. Suddenly he lost his balance, pitched forward and only just saved himself from striking the wall heavily. He sat down on the floor. It was making seventy revolutions a minute. His head began to whirl. He moved towards the middle of the floor and the moment he was off his balance, he rolled and struck his shoulder hard against the wall. The spinning floor pitched him right across the cellar and his knee struck the opposite wall. He rebounded from it into the middle of the floor, and using all the skill he had learned in years of boxing, and all his muscles, he contrived to get himself flat on it, spread-eagled. His head was whirling and dizzy; and the floor spun round faster and faster.

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The library door closed softly; Andrew Rawnsley lay very still. For two minutes he did not stir; then he raised his head cautiously. Then he rose, smiling, and went to an oblong Venetian mirror which hung against the right-hand wall. He took off his wig and beard and laid them on the table, disclosing his head in a tight-fitting leather cap which covered it down to the nape of his neck. He took it off; and it jingled. It was lined with close-set, interlinked steel rings, a perfect piece of chain-mail. He rubbed his head, the head, needless to say, of Paul Mauleverer, the sixth Marquess of Drysdale, ruefully. The pugilist had struck hard. Then he went to his chair by the fire, mixed a whisky and soda, and lighted a cigar. He kept looking at the clock impatiently for perhaps five minutes. Then he went to the window, opened it gently, and leaned out. A humming sound caught his ear; and he laughed softly.

He put on his wig and beard, whistling a pretty tune from a musical comedy, went briskly to the ground-floor room at the end of the left wing. When he came into it, the sound of humming came very clearly to his ears; it was as though a great top were spinning under the floor. He did not trouble to switch on the electric light, for the blinds were undrawn and the moon was shining. He drew aside a rug in the middle of the floor, and set his thumb on a spring. Four feet of the centre

plank rose and remained on end. The hum which came through the opening was almost a low roar. He stretched himself down on the rug and looked down into the circular cellar. In the middle of the spinning floor lay Crinkly Billson, spread-eagled, glued to it.

But he did not at all present the appearance of a man lying on a floor: it was spinning too fast. Crinkly Billson seemed a brown circle covering the middle of the floor. He might have been a brown carpet on a circular dais seven or eight inches high, a brown carpet with a black border, formed by his crinkly, black, spinning hair. And yet the floor had not reached its maximum speed; it was making rather fewer than two hundred revolutions a minute. It would be several minutes yet before it reached the two hundred and fifty.

The sixth Marquess of Drysdale began to laugh grimly—gently at first, and then louder and louder. Presently his grim, vengeful laughter rose to a roar; and the tears dropped out of his joyful eyes on to the spinning Billson.

CHAPTER XXVII

RUPERT PROPOSES

NANCY came from her interview with the Marquess in the garden with a perturbed spirit. She was angry with him—not very angry perhaps, but angry. To her surprise she found herself trembling. She had been angry when Montague Burge had tried to kiss her, much more angry than she had been with the Marquess; but she had not trembled. She could not understand it.

However, she thought that the trouble would soon pass from her mind. It did not. The trembling ceased indeed, but it seemed to have affected her nerves, and she was restless. She told herself that she was attaching too much importance to the matter, but she could not rid her mind of it. She was no longer angry with the Marquess, at least not very; but she was annoyed with him. Things had been very nice as they were, and now they would be different. She felt that he had changed their relation; how she did not know, but it was changed.

Then she grew angry with him again at the sudden thought of the most beautiful woman in

Europe. He was going to marry that most beautiful woman; and he had no business to try to kiss anyone else. It was not fair; it was not right. They had been on such simple, friendly terms, and on friendly terms only; she had told herself so more than once. Now, that was spoiled. He had made her feel uncertain of herself, of her feelings.

She found herself flushing and grew angry again. He most certainly must not be encouraged in this course of conduct; and she would firmly discourage him. She tried to put away from her the thought that the Marquess would be entirely unaffected by any discouraging process of which she was the mistress. How lightly had he taken that slap; and in the suddenness of the surprise at finding his arm round her, she had slapped with all her might. She was visited by a little compunction at the memory of the red imprint of her hand on his cheek. She checked the feeling of compunction quickly; she felt it to be unworthy of her. She ought to rejoice at having punished him so severely. He had thoroughly deserved it. But how little had it affected him; he had made a joke of it, and at once gone on to ask for the kiss on the ridiculous plea that they were friends. He had made not the slightest apology. Truly, he was hard to discourage.

She was again annoyed and even more troubled to find that she could not rid her mind of the matter even after supper. All the evening her spirit

was troubled; and she was restless. She could not read; the face of the Marquess kept coming between her eyes and the page. She saw it very distinctly. When she went to bed she could not sleep; the thought of the Marquess kept her awake. She kept revolving the incidents of their intimacy. Somehow he was altogether changed for her; she saw him with different eyes. She was a little frightened of him, or of herself. She tossed about restlessly; and it was nearly dawn before she fell asleep. She awoke next morning to a changed world. She desired to see the Marquess with her new eyes; yet she feared his coming.

When she came that afternoon to entertain Rupert Drayton, she found a change in him also; it seemed to her that there was a new purpose in his eyes. She wondered had the Marquess changed the whole world for her. Rupert did not as usual beg her to talk before reading to him; he let her begin to read and gazed at her earnestly in a fashion she found discomfiting.

Then he interrupted her suddenly in the middle of a sentence, and said: "Say, Miss Weston, I want to talk to you."

Nancy set her book on her lap and looked at him, smiling, waiting for him to begin. Then she saw that his eyes were shining curiously, and that he looked excited. Her quiet, expectant gaze seemed to confuse him.

"I don't know how to say what I want to," he began in a faltering tone. "It's just beyond me. But—but—you're the most beautiful girl I ever saw."

"Oh," said Nancy, taken aback as she saw what was coming.

"Yes; and you're just the one girl in the world for me," said Rupert, blurring it out rather desperately. "And I've known it ever since I first set eyes on you in that restaurant."

Nancy did not say anything because she did not know what to say. She sat gazing at him with startled eyes and her lips slightly parted.

Her silence and the fact that he had blurted out his declaration gave Rupert a little confidence; he went on in an easier voice: "Yes, I'm dead sure you're the one girl in the world for me. And—and—will you marry me?"

Nancy looked at him as if she could not believe her ears, and indeed she hardly could believe them. She said, faintly: "Marry you?"

"Yes," said Rupert.

Nancy felt that men had suddenly taken to behaving in the most extraordinary way—first the Marquess, and now Rupert. She realized that Rupert was in earnest, in dead earnest. His eager eyes devoured her face, and they were ashine with bright hope.

"Oh, I can't," she said.

"You can't? But you've been so—so kind to me, reading and talking and cheering me up. And—and—you seemed so—so interested in me—I was thinking— Why can't you marry me?"

"I'm not fond enough of you," said Nancy.

"You're not?" said Rupert, in a tone of acute disappointment; and the bright hope began to fade from his eyes. He gazed at her perplexed and troubled face; and her eyes met his with a frank steadiness which disheartened him. Then he added, "But we seemed to be getting so friendly."

"Yes, friendly," said Nancy.

He looked at her with knitted brow; he could not accept her refusal without a struggle; he was too much of a fighter. Besides, she had been friendly—very friendly. Perhaps he had done wrong to take her by surprise; he had been clumsy; he ought to have let her see how he was feeling about her; he ought not to have been so abrupt.

"Don't be in a hurry to say 'No,'" he said, in a pleading tone. "I've rather rushed you. Think it over a bit."

Nancy saw that he was desperately in earnest, and she shrank from hurting him. But it was no use awaking false hopes in him. In her inexperience she had never for a moment considered him in the light of the possible lover. He had never talked like a lover, nor had she ever seen him look like one.

"I don't think it would be any use my thinking

it over," she said, gently, but with a firmness that made his heart sink.

He looked at her, frowning, considering, cudgelling his brains for the right appeal. He could not let her go without a struggle.

Then he said slowly: "I should do my best to give you the best time a woman ever had. And I can do it; I've got two millions already; in another five years I'll have ten. I can give you everything you could dream of—diamonds, Paris frocks, autos, a big house on the lake—everything. You'd like it fine. And there won't be a woman in Chicago anywhere near you. You're prettier, ever so much prettier than any of them."

"But what's the good of all that if I'm not *fond* of you?" said Nancy, gently.

"I know—I know—it don't amount to a row of beans," said Rupert, frankly but despondently. "But then you'd get fond of me. You're the kind of girl who'd be bound to be fond of her husband."

"But it wouldn't be right if I married you first," said Nancy.

"I'll take that chance and willingly," said Rupert, quickly.

Nancy shook her head.

Rupert saw that the only thing to do was to fight for time.

"Now don't you hurry to say 'No'," he pleaded. "There isn't any hurry at all. I want you to think

it over quietly. I've been too quick, and startled you. You want time to get used to the idea."

"No; it wouldn't be fair to let you go on hoping," said Nancy, earnestly. "I'm very sorry; but it wouldn't be any use my thinking it over."

Rupert's heart sank in him; there was the accent of finality in her tone. He said: "It's that damned Marquess."

"Oh, no; indeed it isn't!" said Nancy, quickly. "He's going to marry the most beautiful woman in Europe."

CHAPTER XXVIII

ANDREW RAWNSLEY TALKS TO INSPECTOR GIFFEN

THE spinning pugilist was quite unaware of the falling tears of the sixth Marquess of Drysdale; he was but very dimly aware of his laughter. When at last the Marquess had laughed his fill, he shouted loudly down at the brown carpet with the black border:

“Remember Henry Rawnsley, you dog! Henry Rawnsley!”

His shout came to the pugilist faint from far away. It might have been a voice shouting to him from the roof. He did not at all realize that it was the voice of the benevolent old gentleman whom but a few minutes before he had knocked on the head. The meaning of the words was slower still penetrating his whirling brain; but at last he understood that he was expiating the murder on the Mall; and he lost hope.

His dizzy, whirling head was splitting with pain. He was not lying exactly in the middle of the revolving floor. His head was nearly a foot further from the centre of the circle than his feet; and as

the floor spun faster and faster it drove the blood into his head with a steadily increasing pressure. The pain was growing more and more dreadful. His head was being crushed in a slowly tightening vice. Now and again a horrible pang shot through it as if a red hot needle were thrust down some nerve; he was breathing stertorously, like an apoplectic.

Suddenly the Marquess saw a change in the color of the carpet. There was a red rim beyond the black border. A narrow red rim at first, it grew broader quickly. He perceived that the blood was being forced from the pugilist's nose. He laughed again grimly. Then he pressed down the plank, drew the rug over it, and went to bed.

Twice or thrice as he undressed he paused to laugh grimly at the thought of his vengeance.

He slept peacefully. Once only during the night was he awakened—by his own grim laughter; he had been dreaming of his son's murderer spinning round on the cellar floor. He did not go to look at him till he had eaten his breakfast. He was in no hurry. When he did look down he saw that the brown carpet had now a dark red rim nearly two feet wide round it, and that the brown of the carpet had grown lighter; it had become distinctly a reddish brown.

Presently the Marquess rose quietly from his peephole and looked round the room. There were

many beautiful objects in it, as indeed there were in all the rooms in the House on the Mall. From them he selected a small Japanese bronze figure, weighing two or three pounds. He lay down again over his peephole, and dropped the figure into the middle of the reddish brown carpet. It bounced off it, touched the spinning floor, and dashed with swift violence about the cellar, striking now the wall, now the floor, and now the spread-eagled body of the pugilist. Presently it came to rest, wedged somewhere against it. As far as the Marquess could see, the pugilist had not made the slightest movement. He rose, closed his peephole, and came beaming out of the room. He was in a deep content at having taken vengeance on one of the murderers of his son.

He went out into the garden, smoked a cigar in a leisurely fashion, enjoyed it thoroughly and came back into the house. In the hall he put on his shiny top-hat and then went into the dining-room. His breakfast still stood on the table; he cut a tin loaf in two and put half of it under his coat. Then he walked round to No. 11 Malkin Lane, went down into the cellar, and through the revolving door in the wall into the underground passage. He went along it, through the central chamber (in that confined space, the spinning floor roared rather than hummed) and along the left-hand passage. Nearly at the end of it he stopped and switched on an electric light, revealing a groove in the wall. He

pressed a spring; and the lift came up from the prison of Inspector Giffen. The water jug stood on the shelf where the Inspector had set it after he had emptied it. The Marquess filled it from a can which Pettigrew had set beside the lift, put it back on the shelf, the bread beside it, and sent the lift down again. Then he stooped down and pulled out of its hasp a steel bar which held down a slab.

Inspector Giffen was not happy. Used to a generous diet he found mere bread an unpalatable food. He missed also, even more, the beer with which he was wont to wash down his meals and the whisky with which he comforted his stomach in the evenings and at odd times during the day. The fact that he was enjoying a rest-cure with the appropriate diet comforted him but little; there was nothing of the faddist about Inspector Giffen.

His situation weighed upon him. From "Wonderful Escapes" he had drawn little useful information and no comfort. None of the wonderful escapes seemed to have been made from so far under the earth as he believed himself to be; and none of them had been made from a cement chamber. Also every escape had taken weeks or months to compass. He reflected again and again on the character of the sixth Marquess of Drysdale; and the more he reflected on it the less he liked it. A man who had murdered his wife, at the most for having discovered that he had committed bigamy,

would be very unlikely to make any bones about murdering a detective who could prove him guilty of that murder. He could only suppose that it was Andrew Rawnsley who had preserved him from instant death.

He had only half a candle left when the Marquess sent down his light, healthy breakfast; and he was grieved to perceive that no fresh candles came down with it. He had sat down on his bed, cut a slice from the tin loaf and bitten into it, when there came a grating sound, and the slab rose out of the opening by which he had entered the cellar. Looking up he saw the benevolent face of Andrew Rawnsley bent over the opening.

"Good morning, Inspector," he said, in his deep, rich voice. "Are you getting tired of your prison?"

"Yes, I am," said the Inspector, in a tone which he strove in vain to render affable.

"Ah, well; it shows you the folly of interfering with the wrong man. You may think yourself lucky that I was about when you discovered the Marquess. If I hadn't been, you'd be in your grave, not in a prison. My brother—I expect you gathered from our likeness that he is my brother—is not a man to stick at trifles; and the wonder is that your body isn't floating about the Thames near Gravesend."

"That's all very well, but you can't get rid of one of us as easily as all that. It's not like a private

person. All the Force is looking for me now," said the Inspector.

"Don't talk nonsense," said Andrew Rawnsley. "My brother could have got rid of you with perfect ease and absolute safety, and so can I. You see in humbugging my parlor-maid—an obviously honest girl—you have hidden your own tracks perfectly. Two of your colleagues have been inquiring here for you; and they know that you came to the house, stayed a minute or two in the hall, and went out of it again. My parlor-maid is quite convinced of this; and your colleagues believe her absolutely."

"Silly fools!" growled Inspector Giffen.

"Quite so; but what I came to say to you is, that you'll stay here till my brother has got safely away to his home. I don't want to be bothered with you particularly; and I've no doubt that we can come to an arrangement, you and I, quietly between ourselves, that I am to have no further trouble in the matter."

"You think you're going to scrag me and lock me up here on bread and water and not pay for it!" cried the detective, angrily.

"Yes I do," said Andrew Rawnsley, coolly. "The longer you stay here the more clearly you'll see the advantage of that arrangement. I may tell you that I have a perfect alibi for every moment I spend with you, including the time I spent with my brother bringing you here. But if you won't see reason,

I'm very much afraid that eventually your body will be found, in a very emaciated state, floating in the Thames near Gravesend. Bread and water isn't much of a diet, but it's better than nothing at all, as you'll find out if you're obstinate. You'll learn that we're a family who don't bear meddling with. You think it over carefully." He ended in tones of quiet but very dangerous menace; and on the last words closed the opening.

Inspector Giffen ate his breakfast very gloomily; and as he ate it, he did consider the matter carefully. He was much annoyed to hear that his colleagues had inquired for him at the House on the Mall and gone away satisfied of the truth of Annie's story. The very simplicity of the device which had given him undisturbed access to the house had, as Andrew Rawnsley said, hidden his tracks completely. The more he considered the matter the more awkward it grew.

He remembered the way in which his pallid young superior had received his story that Andrew Rawnsley was the sixth Marquess of Drysdale. Now he had to go to him with a story of having discovered yet another Marquess of Drysdale in the same house with Andrew Rawnsley. He had to tell and convince him of the truth of the extraordinary story of how he had been kidnapped and imprisoned underground. He had to find the entrance to that prison, or rather to the underground passage

leading to it. He could not see his superiors having the garden of the Mall dug up to find that passage. He doubted that they would believe enough of his story to take any steps in the matter at all. The most they would do would be to set inquiries on foot about the Marquess of Drysdale; and seeing that his nephew was Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, he did not think that those inquiries would be prosecuted with any great vigor. He believed Andrew Rawnsley's assurance that he would have an alibi for every moment he spent with him. There would be no touching a man of his unblemished reputation, of his weight and influence in the district. He could not even be troubled without the strongest evidence. All the evidence he himself had got was his bare word. Of course there was the statue of the stolen Hebe. But where was that now? Assuredly not in the House on the Mall. He began to see quite clearly that he had nothing to gain except bread and water in a cement cell, with a prospect of ultimate starvation, by not making terms with Andrew Rawnsley, and ceasing to bother himself about the sixth Marquess of Drysdale.

For his part Andrew Rawnsley was going about the world beaming with even greater benevolence than usual. He made several jokes to the heads of his departments about their reports and showed some surprise to hear that Montague Burge had not returned. They agreed with him that the man-

ager of the Jewelry Department could not possibly have read in the papers of the burning of his house, or he would have returned at once. Andrew Rawnsley said that it was probably owing to the fact that he had gone abroad to buy precious stones. He knew that he had left London on that errand, he said, but he had been under the impression that he was going to the Brazilian diamond firms in Liverpool. Plainly he must have gone abroad; had he been in England he would have been bound to have learned of the burning of his house. The heads of his departments agreed with him.

Andrew Rawnsley's cheerfulness lasted through the morning. He made more jokes as he dictated the answers to his letters to Nancy. When he came back to his house to lunch he leaned out of the library window and made sure that the humming still continued. He did not go and look through his peephole into the cellar. He had rather lost interest in the matter; it was enough that his vengeance was being accomplished.

That night he made an excellent dinner. After it he read "Marie Claire" and the last volume of "Jean Christophe" with leisurely appreciation, hardly skipping a page. He smoked several cigars and drank three whiskies and sodas. At a quarter to two in the morning he rose from his armchair, stretched himself and yawned. He went out into the hall and called up the speaking-tube to Pettigrew.

Presently Pettigrew came down the stairs with his eyes very bright as if he had just been awakened from a pleasant sleep. They went down into the basement and along the passages to the door of the circular cellar. Andrew Rawnsley stooped down and pressed the head of a broad nail in the bottom of the door-post, then he leaned against the wall, waiting. In a couple of minutes the hum of the spinning floor had grown fainter; in another six minutes it had hushed altogether.

Andrew Rawnsley opened the door and looked in. The floor was still. He entered the cellar and stepping gingerly over the murderer's body, went to the panel which hid the switches. He pressed the spring and when it opened, pressed up the top switch. The sheet of steel which covered the opening in the floor glided slowly back. He pressed down the bottom switch and the opening moved round to the head of the steps. Pettigrew went down them and brought the ambulance to the foot of them. They carried Billson's body down the steps, laid it on the ambulance, and wheeled it along the passage which ran back under the house. The ambulance moved easily because the floor of the passage sloped gently downwards. They had gone some two hundred feet before they came to the end of it; and for the last thirty or forty feet they moved through the sound of rushing water; the tide of the Thames was ebbing swiftly above their heads. The

passage widened at its end into a little chamber about ten feet long and seven feet broad. The end of it was closed by a steel door. They lifted the murderer's body off the ambulance and set it against that door.

"He won't murder any more young fellows," said Pettigrew, in a tone of quiet satisfaction.

"He won't," said Andrew Rawnsley, gazing down at the sprawling figure. "But it's odd that the floor should have killed a big man like that so quickly. Wilkins lasted thirty-six hours on it and Mr. Apsley-Craig thirty-nine."

"Perhaps it was the drink, my lord," suggested Pettigrew, in a respectful tone.

"I dare say," said Andrew Rawnsley, carelessly; and then he added more thoughtfully: "It's a great nuisance that these people will be so treacherous."

He turned on his heel; and they came back along the passage till they were under the house again. Another passage branched off from the one they were in and ran under the left wing. Just beyond its opening Andrew Rawnsley pressed hard against a brick in the right-hand wall, and a steel door sank slowly down in grooves from the roof of the passage they were in, closing it behind them. Now, anyone coming into the branch passage under the left wing would only find open the passage which ran under the river to the steel door against which lay the body of Billson.

"Now, I think that everything's ready for Mr. Shore-Wardell," said Andrew Rawnsley, grimly; and they came out of the passage and went up the stairs of the circular cellar.

CHAPTER XXIX

MR. SHORE-WARDELL GOES DOWN THE THAMES

MR. SHORE-WARDELL had been dining with Paul Mauleverer, and plainly dining well. His face was flushed and his shallow blue eyes were shining brightly. He was leaning forward over the table, supported by his arms (not that he yet needed their support, but after dinner it was his favorite attitude), and as he stirred his coffee he smiled at his host like a large beaming baby. Paul Mauleverer was smiling, too, as he leaned back in his tilted chair. Pettigrew put down a box of cigars at Mr. Shore-Wardell's left hand.

On the instant Paul Mauleverer tilted his chair an inch to far and went over backward on the floor with a crash. Even as he fell Pettigrew raised the hem of the startled guest's dinner-jacket, and deftly drew from his hip pocket the revolver, without which he never went to the House on the Mall.

Paul Mauleverer swore a little and picked himself up, laughing. As he sat down again he said, "Well, if that's not a silly thing to do!"

"Yes; for goodness sake, don't do it again! It jars my nerves," said Mr. Shore-Wardell a little pettishly.

Pettigrew lighted their cigars and left the room.

"What's this about the disappearance of Burge? I read that his house was burned, and now I read that he has disappeared himself," said Mr. Shore-Wardell.

"Burge has disappeared for good. He was found to be plotting treachery," said Paul Mauleverer in his harshest and most rasping tones.

Mr. Shore-Wardell felt a little thrill of discomfort. He was conscious of having plotted treachery himself. It had not been discovered, could not be discovered; but there it was. Almost involuntarily his hand stole round to feel the comforting butt of his revolver. He did not feel it. He felt an empty pocket, and the flush in his face grew several shades lighter.

He looked at Mauleverer earnestly, and Mauleverer looked at him. There was a gleam of mocking menace in his fine brown eyes. Mr. Shore-Wardell felt his mouth growing dry. The room seemed suddenly chilly.

"By the way, I don't think you ever knew that my other name was Rawnsley—Andrew Rawnsley," said Mauleverer very slowly.

There came a short, gasping sigh from Mr. Shore-

Wardell and he said faintly, "No. I can't say that I ever did."

"Yes; Andrew Rawnsley. I'm the father of the boy you and that blackguard Billson murdered on the Mall," rasped out Paul Mauleverer, and there was a flame in his eye.

Mr. Shore-Wardell rose stiffly to his feet. His forehead was suddenly shining. He said, "I—I don't know what you're talking about."

Paul Mauleverer laughed, a harsh, scornful laugh.

"Liar," he said.

"It wasn't a murder. It was an accident—pure accident," cried Mr. Shore-Wardell in his high, squeaky voice. "Billson never meant to harm the boy at all. Only to get the notes off him. It was that blundering fool's fault entirely. He made a mistake. It was an accident."

"You let that blackguard loose on the boy, with a life-preserver, and call it an accident," cried Paul Mauleverer in a terrible voice. "Well, for that accident I'm going to cut your throat from ear to ear!"

He sprang to his feet, and in his hand there gleamed a long, cruel-looking knife.

Mr. Shore-Wardell uttered a gasping howl and dashed to the door. He thought to find it locked, but it opened. He bounced through it, slammed it behind him, and rushed down the corridor. The

iron gate at its entrance was closed and locked. He turned to see Paul Mauleverer coming out of the dining room, the knife gleaming in his hand.

Mr. Shore-Wardell dashed for the nearest doorway, and found himself at the foot of a flight of stairs leading upward. He tore up them to find that they ended in a trapdoor. He thrust at it, and it rose. He scrambled through it, found himself on the roof, slammed down the trapdoor and threw himself down on it, bruising his little finger against a key sticking up out of it. He snatched at it, it turned to his pressure and locked down the trapdoor.

He uttered a great sob of relief, and mopped the sweat from his brow. Then he looked about him. The bright moon showed him that he was on a flat, parapetted roof. He sat, shaking and panting, trying to think what to do, listening for steps on the stairs under him. Should he go to the parapet and shout for help? Plainly it was the thing to do; but he could not bring himself yet to leave the trapdoor. He listened for Mauleverer's attempt to force it.

On a sudden, as he sat hesitating, he heard a grating noise on the further side of the block of chimneys on his right hand. Then above the chimneys appeared a white face, rising. He gasped and stared. The face, shoulders, and bust of a woman

rose above the chimneys and were still. It was the stolen Hebe.

In a flash Mr. Shore-Wardell understood. The statue rose or sank on a kind of lift. Mauleverer had come up in the compartment under the Hebe, he was behind the chimneys. Mr. Shore-Wardell sprang to his feet and ran down the roof yelling for help. He came to a block of chimneys, and as he slipped behind them looked back to see Mauleverer running along the roof. He kicked off his shoes and ran to the next block of chimneys. There were five of these blocks on the roof. He stood behind it listening with all his ears. Then he heard Mauleverer's faint, running footfalls. As they came round the right side of the block he bolted round the left and flew to the next. From block to block he dodged his pursuer, rushing, sweating, panting. Always his terrified eyes cast about for a weapon. Then he came round the block behind which had risen the stolen statue. It was six feet above him in the air, set on the top of a pillar. Rushing round it, he found that it was not a pillar but a tube, and open on that side. He thrust his hand into it and felt the rope of the lift. He stepped inside the tube, jerked the rope hard, and the lift went down. As the top of the opening sank under the roof he heard Mauleverer laugh.

The lift went down and down. Thirty feet down, as he judged, he tried to check it, but it sank

and sank. At last it stopped with a little jar. He stepped out of it on to a cold stone floor, in utter darkness. He groped about him and found that he was in a narrow passage. Then he heard the lift behind him begin to rise.

He hurried down the passage, bumping against the walls. It turned sharply to the left, and he pressed on, his left hand against the wall guiding him, his right outstretched in front of him. Then he heard a rushing sound above his head, it was rushing water, he must be under the Thames. Ten seconds later he trod on a loose brick which gave under his foot, and on the instant there was a loud click behind him. Two more steps and his right hand struck against a door, closing the passage, his left foot struck against something soft. He stopped and ran his hand over the surface of the door, it 'closed the passage from wall to wall. He stooped down, and his hand touched a man's face—it was very cold.

He stepped back, tore his match-box out of his pocket, struck a match and looked down on the dead face of Crinkly Billson.

He uttered a whining howl, and turned to a sound at his back. A steel door was sinking from the roof and closing the passage behind him. He made a step toward it, it was too late—it had already sunk to within a foot of the floor. He watched it with staring eyes till it touched the floor. As

it touched it the dead body of the pugilist jerked forward from against the other door, and a sheet of water seemed to spurt from the floor. It drove with terrific force right across his prison, drenching his legs. It thickened. He stared at it, uncomprehending. Then he understood—the door into the Thames was rising, rising very slowly. His prison would be full to the roof three or four minutes before the door had risen two feet.

Mr. Shore-Wardell began to scream.

CHAPTER XXX

COLONEL WEBLING ACTS PRECIPITATELY

PAUL MAULEVERER watched the stolen Hebe sink out of sight with a grim smile on his face. Then he went to the trap-door, opened it, and called down to Pettigrew to bring him up some cigars and his field-glasses. When they came, he lighted a cigar, took the field-glasses, went to the parapet, sat down on it and smoked quietly, gazing down on the moon-lit Thames. Two or three times he looked at his watch. At the expiration of eight minutes he put the glasses to his eyes and stared down through them at a spot about thirty feet from the shore. A little more than two minutes later a dark mass rose to the surface. He saw whirling limbs and caught a glimpse of a white face. The dark mass sank slowly under the water as it was swept downstream. Paul Mauleverer laughed his grim laugh.

He shut up the glasses and went down the stairs, closing the trapdoor behind him. In the corridor he found Annie with an express letter in her hand. He opened it and read:

DEAR MAULEVERER:

I got a badly wrenched ankle in the course of that little job, so have only just got back to town. I wish you would come round and see me. I think you would be interested to hear about it. You may as well come round to-night, and I'll tell you about it while it is fresh in my mind.

Yours sincerely,

CLAUDE WEBLING.

Paul Mauleverer looked at the letter, frowning and very thoughtful. Then he told Pettigrew to telephone to the garage for his motor car. Then he went into his bedroom, put on a light overcoat and took from a drawer a small double-barreled Deringer pistol. He put it into the right-hand pocket of his overcoat.

Fatimah opened the door of the Colonel's flat and greeted him with her usual scowl. Paul Mauleverer paid no heed to it—he had seen it so often. But he came through the door of Colonel Webling's sitting room with both hands in the pockets of his overcoat.

Colonel Webling lay stretched on a divan, wearing only one slipper. His left foot was bandaged.

"How are you? I'm sorry to hear you've had an accident. I hope it isn't much," said Paul Mauleverer in cheery tones, but his keen eyes scanned Colonel Webling's face closely.

Colonel Webling looked very much as usual, a

sleepy vulture. Perhaps his face was a little paler than its wont; but in a man with a wrenched ankle that was natural.

"How are you, Mauleverer?" he said in his slow deep voice, taking the mouthpiece of his narghileh from his lips. "My ankle's nothing—a bad wrench. A few days' rest will put it right."

"Good," said Paul Mauleverer, and he took off his hat and crossed the room to a divan facing that on which the Colonel lay.

"Half a moment," said Colonel Webling slowly. "I've got something to show you. Over there—on the table by the window—under that cloth."

Paul Mauleverer turned to the table and saw a large square of colored silk covering some object about eight inches high. He went to the table, raised the cloth a little, let it fall from his fingers, jerked it sharply aside, *and stared down at the severed head of Zoraida Webling.*

He did not turn. His hands sank down into his overcoat pockets, then he did not stir, he gazed down at the dead face.

"Dear—dear—dear—what a pity! Such a pretty creature!" he said in a low, soft tone, very unlike his usual rasping accents. Then he cried: "You stupid, jealous fool! There was no reason!"

On the last word he turned sharply, and as he turned he fired from his pocket.

Colonel Webling's revolver cracked at the same

instant. Paul Mauleverer fell heavily forward on to his face. Colonel Webling writhed two or three times and lay still, staring at the fallen man. The door flew open, and the affrighted Fatimah stood on the threshold, peering through the smoke at the evil her vicious tongue had wrought.

Paul Mauleverer raised himself a little from the floor, gazed at the glazing eyes of Colonel Webling, and said faintly, with a shadow of a smile on his white face, "It was the emeralds—the Aldington Emeralds—those green stones bring bad luck."

He sank down again on to his face and was still.

CHAPTER XXXI

INSPECTOR GIFFEN LEAVES THE HOUSE ON THE MALL

AT half-past nine the next morning the Marquess of Drysdale knocked at the door of the House on the Mall. Pettigrew, pale and scared, opened it, his eyes were red as if he had been weeping for his dead master.

"This is a shocking business, and I thought I'd better come at once in case there was anything I ought to do," said the Marquess, as he walked quickly into the dining room.

"I've got instructions about most things, your lordship," said Pettigrew. "But there's a gentleman—a detective gentleman—in the prison cell. He's been there a good many days."

"The prison cell? And where's the prison cell?" said the astonished Marquess.

"It's toward the end of the underground passage to the power-house, under the Wellingtonias," said Pettigrew. "He doesn't know as I had anything to do with his being there—only his lordship."

"A detective in a prison cell under the Welling-

tonias! This is very cheering," said the Marquess gloomily. "We'd better let him out. I suppose he knew my uncle?"

"Yes, your lordship; that's what he got in the prison cell for," said Pettigrew. "But as to getting him out, I've had instructions how to do that without his finding out anything about the underground passages, only I didn't like to do it before you came. I thought your lordship might like to speak to him before he goes."

"I should. You'd better get him out and bring him here at once," said the Marquess, and he sat down in an easy chair and took out his cigarette case.

Inspector Giffen, waiting impatiently for his breakfast, was surprised to hear a noise in the ceiling which assured him that the slab was being raised. But when it had been raised he could see nothing, for the passage above was pitch dark.

Then a gruff voice, which he did not recognize, said: "I'm going to let down a ladder for you to come up by. But when I say 'Stop!' you stand still on it till I've blindfolded you. Try any tricks, and you'll get a knife jammed into your ribs."

Inspector Giffen's heart leaped in him: "No fear!" he said shakily. "All I want is to get out. I'll come as quiet as a lamb."

"You'd better," said the gruff voice earnestly.

A ladder came from down the opening. The

inspector climbed it with surprisingly shaky legs, but his heart beat high. When, as his head rose above the passage floor, the voice said "Stop!" he stopped dead till he had been blindfolded. His ill-fed captivity had lowered his fine spirit. He only wished to be free. Then his gaoler took hold of the collar of his coat, drew him up the rest of the ladder, and marched him along the passage. Inspector Giffen moved like a quiet lamb, though in his joy at being out of the cell he could well have gambled. They went up the flight of steps into the circular cellar, and Inspector Giffen sniffed the fresh air with heartfelt joy. There had been many moments in his cell when he had looked never to breathe fresh air again. His gaoler marched him through the cellar, along the passages, to the foot of the stairs leading up to the hall. There he halted him, saying, "Stand still." Then he went back down the passage into the darkness, and called, "Take off that bandage, and go up to the dining room."

Inspector Giffen whipped off the bandage, and, oh, he was glad to be dazzled by the light of day! He went up the stairs, opened the dining-room door and confronted the Seventh Marquess of Drysdale.

For the Marquess the law had little interest and no terror. He surveyed the unkempt, grimy, stubbly-bearded detective with an air of gloomy dis-

gust, then he said, "So my uncle has been keeping you in his private prison, has he? It serves you right for bothering a man about a bigamy he committed twenty years ago, when raking it up can do no living soul any good whatever."

"Bigamy, my lord? It wasn't bigamy I wanted him for, it was murder," said Inspector Giffen.

"What do you mean?" said the Marquess, and his acquired solemnity kept his surprise and dismay out of his face.

After its enforced rest for so many days the tongue of Inspector Giffen was glad to wag. He poured out what he knew of the misdoings of the Sixth Marquess of Drysdale with eager garrulity. The Marquess was astonished and shocked. He had not known that his uncle was alive till two years after his sham suicide, then he had been told that he had disappeared, in his effective fashion, to escape a prosecution for bigamy. They had grown friendly, and he had fallen into the habit of consulting his uncle, for whose business capacity he had the greatest admiration, about matters connected with his estates. Then the inspector told of the stolen Hebe, and the Marquess began to wonder what he would learn next about his versatile kinsman. Already he had got a dead Colonel, a decapitated lady, an imprisoned detective, a murdered wife, and a stolen statue. There had been depths in his uncle's nature of which he had never

dreamed. He had merely believed him to be an admirable man of business with a weakness for women. His uncle's had indeed been a full life—he was never to know how full.

His imperturbable, gloomy face did not reveal his astonishment and dismay. At the end of the inspector's story he said: "My uncle's dead, so that, supposing them to be true, your discoveries are now useless. You will, of course, have to explain to your superiors the reason of your enforced absence; but I don't think you will want to talk at large about how you were kidnapped by two old men. With regard to the statue, I will myself see that it is returned to its proper owner, and I shall compensate you myself for your unpleasant imprisonment. I think we might say a hundred pounds."

Inspector Giffen's heart leaped again with joy. He thanked the Marquess warmly, and assured him that since such accidents did not redound to the credit of the detective force, he would by no means talk about his imprisonment. Then he bade the Marquess good morning and withdrew. He was eager to get back to his little West Kensington home.

When the front door closed behind him, Pettigrew came to the Marquess.

"Well, have you any more of these interesting surprises for me?" said the Marquess gloomily.

"No, your lordship; I don't think there's anything else your lordship need know."

The Marquess appreciated Pettigrew's reticence.

They went upstairs to Paul Mauleverer's rooms. Pettigrew took a key from his pocket, unlocked a drawer in a bureau, took out a large, sealed envelope, on which was written, "To be given to the Marquess of Drysdale in the event of my death or disappearance," and handed it to the Marquess. The Marquess opened it and found that it contained a page of foolscap in his uncle's handwriting. He sat down in an easy chair and read it.

It had been written but a few days before. His uncle had either been alive to the dangers he ran in avenging his son on two dangerous men like the pugilist and Mr. Shore-Wardell, or he had had a premonition of impending misfortune. The envelope contained a power of attorney enabling the Marquess to take complete charge of Andrew Rawnsley's affairs in the event of his disappearance and act for him. Also it contained a letter informing the Marquess that his uncle's will was in the hands of his solicitors and in it he had left half of his fortune and half of the Emporium to Nancy and half to the Marquess, in the event of their not marrying. In the event of their marrying he had left all his fortune and the Emporium to Nancy. The Marquess laughed. He recognized his uncle's queer humor. In the event of Nancy

not marrying the Marquess she was to marry Rupert Drayton, because, said the writer, he had a great admiration for the up-to-date, strenuous young American, and had been at the pains to kidnap Rupert and break his leg in order that he and Nancy might be properly thrown together and have the best possible opportunity of falling in love with one another.

The Marquess blinked, and then he laughed. To sandbag a young man and break his leg in order that he and a young woman might be thrown together, seemed to him of a thoroughness almost archaic. It set him pondering on his uncle's character. How strong in it the Wentworth strain had been, and by what admirable abilities had it been supported! Had his uncle but exercised those great talents in the more reputable spheres, with what enthusiasm would impassioned biographers have lauded his grand simplicity and directness. But for his unfortunate weakness in the matter of women, he might have served his country well. As it was—a great proconsul wasted on private crime.

He finished the letter and betook himself to Rupert's bedroom. He found Rupert gloomy indeed. He had been reflecting and reflecting on Nancy's words, and even more on her manner. The longer he reflected the more deeply sank his hopes of winning her. It grew clearer and clearer that she had never felt more than friendliness for

him, and that it was indeed unlikely that she ever would feel more than friendliness. He had not the key to her English heart, always supposing that that heart had not already been given to another. He suspected very strongly that it had, and that that other was the Marquess. He received him gloomily, and the news of the death of Andrew Rawnsley made him gloomier still.

The Marquess was very civil, and sympathetic in his inquiries about the progress toward recovery of Rupert's broken leg, and having learned that he had everything he needed, he was turning to go when Rupert said:

"I want a word with you about Miss Weston."

The Marquess drew himself up stiffly and was on the point of saying that Nancy was no subject of discussion for them, when he remembered how Rupert had come by his broken leg, and he looked at him solemnly, waiting for him to speak.

"You've been seeing a good deal of Miss Weston lately—she told me so," said Rupert slowly.

"As much as I possibly could," said the Marquess.

"Well, I want to know what you are doing," said Rupert. "I don't know much about the way things go in England, but I do know that Marquesses aren't in the habit of seeing so much of working girls—not for their good."

"There are Marquesses and Marquesses," said

the Marquess solemnly; then he smiled and added, "I suppose that technically you have no right to ask me any such question. But in these matters one can be too technical, and so I will tell you frankly that I propose to ask Miss Weston to marry me."

Rupert looked at him steadily and then he said, "Thank you. I thought you mightn't be on the square, but you are."

"Oh, yes," said the Marquess cheerfully, and he bade him good morning.

Rupert gazed at the closed door with the gloomiest eyes in the world. He had a strong feeling that Nancy would say "yes" to the proposal of the Marquess. He felt very bitter; the luck had indeed been against him. If only he had found her before the Marquess. Well, there was always his work; he must get back to Chicago, to the strenuous life he loved, and forget her.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN EUROPE

ABOUT the disappearance of Andrew Rawnsley the Marquess of Drysdale preserved a judicious silence. Like the great clock-work machine it was, in the hands of the able heads of its departments, the Emporium continued to supply the wants of its customers without a hitch. Of late years its proprietor had performed merely a consultative function, and he had so provided against his disappearance that the Marquess saw his way to turning it into a liability limited company without informing the world that he was dead.

The papers were doing full justice to the tragedy in Colonel Webling's flat; and the interest in it was heightened by the disappearance of Mr. Shore-Wardell immediately after dining with Paul Mauleverer on the night he was shot. There were but a few paragraphs about the disappearance of Crinkly Billson, but Mrs. Billson, the evening after his death, received a package by hand which contained three hundred pounds in gold. The Sixth

Marquess of Drysdale had seen to it that she did not suffer by the loss of her husband.

His body and that of Mr. Shore-Wardell were picked up within half a mile of one another in the lower reaches of the Thames ten days later. No one connected them with one another. Mr. Shore-Wardell had died by drowning, the autopsy showed that Crinkly Billson had died of some very curious form of congestion of the brain. His brain, indeed, is preserved in spirits, for the instruction of students, in the Museum of the Middlesex Hospital.

On the two days after the death of Andrew Rawnsley Nancy sat in his empty office waiting for him to come to dictate answers to the growing pile of letters on his desk. She spent the idle hours reading, or, rather, trying to read. Most of the time she thought about the Marquess. She had not seen him for four days. He seemed to have vanished from her life.

She wondered about it with a growing anxiety which she could not quite understand. It was far too acute an anxiety to feel about a friend of six weeks' standing. She thought it most likely that he had realized how wrongly he had behaved in the matter of that attempted kiss, and had removed himself from further temptation. She perceived clearly that he was doing the right thing; she applauded the action. But her heart sank. She was beginning to feel that his withdrawal had left a

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dreadful gap in her life. At times she was so unhappy that she found herself wishing that he had not removed himself from temptation with such firmness. The wish shocked her.

On the morning of the third day Annie brought word that she was to have her typewriter carried from the Emporium to the library of the House on the Mall, and work there. It was set on a table before the window, and she sat down in front of it, waiting for Mr. Rawnsley. She sat gazing out into the garden, and presently fell to dreaming of the Marquess. An hour later she heard a step in the hall, the handle of the door turned, she looked round expecting to see her employer, and the Marquess came in.

At the sudden, unexpected sight Nancy flushed, and disliked herself very much for flushing. That did not stop the flush. He came down the room, looking very solemn, held out his hand and said: "How do you do? You must have missed me dreadfully. It's four days since we saw one another."

"I haven't," cried Nancy, swiftly defensive; and she withdrew her hand from his with some vigor since he was holding it tightly.

"Oh, come, that's very unfriendly," said the Marquess in a dolorous tone. "I've missed you dreadfully. Very unfriendly indeed, I call it."

Nancy was confused by his unexpected entry and the clasp of his hand; rising, she said hurriedly,

"Oh, of course, I've missed you like that in—in a friendly way."

"In what way did you think I meant you'd missed me?" said the Marquess with a sudden, very lively interest.

Nancy felt that she was blushing furiously, and she disliked herself more than ever. She disliked the Marquess, too, very much. She said with some heat, "I didn't think that you meant that I'd missed you in any particular way at all."

The Marquess looked at her with a solemn, maddening perplexity. "This is getting very complicated," he said. "I don't quite follow you."

"Oh, let's talk about something else!" said Nancy.

The Marquess looked at her carefully, and said, "Certainly; I think I like you best when you have a lot of color in your cheeks."

Nancy gasped: "Oh! I think—I think you're detestable!" she said in a tone of extreme exasperation.

"Oh, no, I'm not—not at all," said the Marquess in a most amiable tone, and he gazed at her earnestly.

Nancy found it difficult to recover herself under the gaze of his penetrating eyes. She looked round the room rather wildly.

"Look here, I want to ask you something very serious," he said.

"What is it?" said Nancy, relieved by a change of subject.

"You wouldn't deceive me, would you?" said the Marquess very solemnly indeed.

"Of course not," said Nancy; and then she added with quick caution. "I don't know—it depends."

"Well, I want to know: do you honestly believe that there's a more beautiful woman in Europe than yourself?" said the Marquess.

"Me?" cried the astounded Nancy. "Why, of course there is!"

"Fibber," said the Marquess, and he laughed his joyous laugh. "I knew you'd try to deceive me. You know there isn't."

Nancy stared at him rather dazed.

He took a step forward, caught her hands, and said, "But it's no good trying to deceive me, Nancy. Not a bit. I've got my eyes, you know; and before me I see the goal of my ambition—the most beautiful woman in Europe."

Nancy was trembling, but this time she did not snatch her hand away. She wanted to hear more about the subject. It had begun really to interest her. She did.

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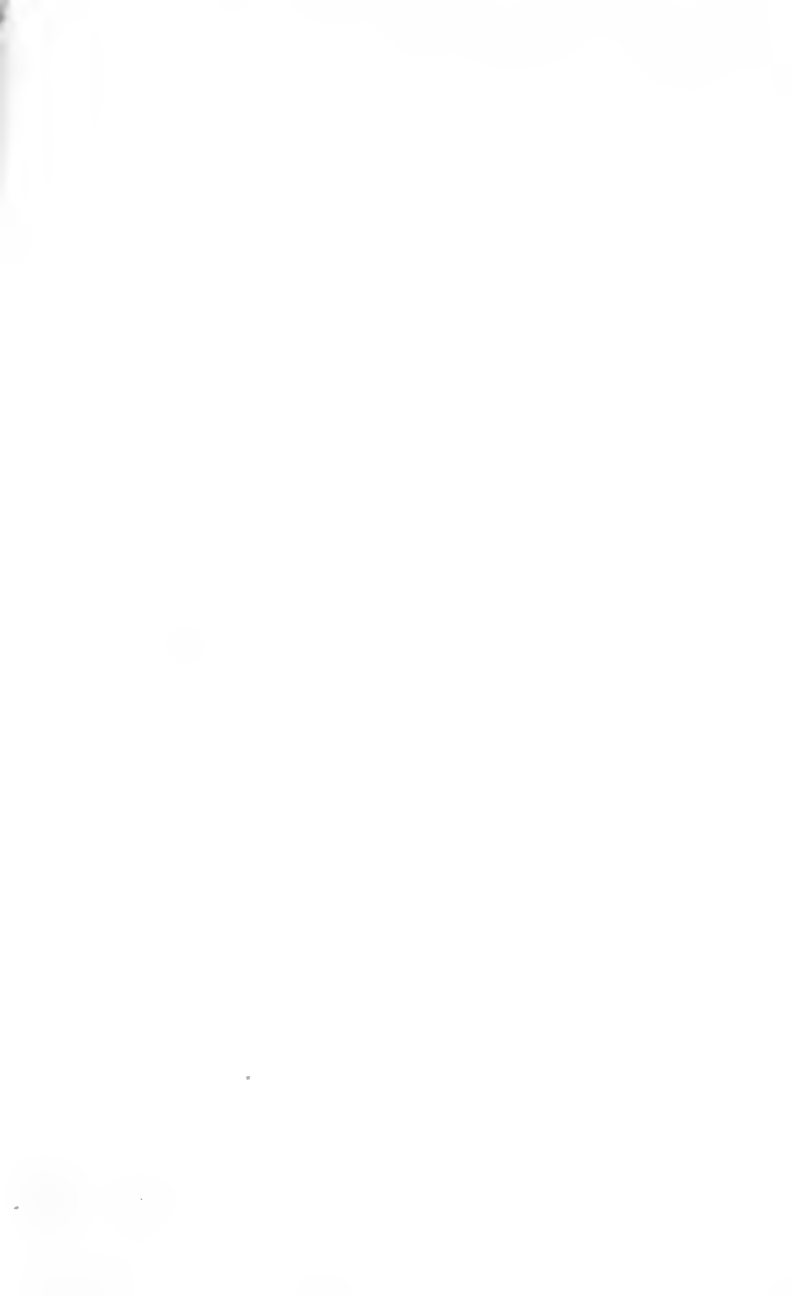
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